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THE SPEAKER'S BIBLE

EDITED BY

JAMES HASTINGS, D.D.

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THE SPEAKER'S BIBLE

EDITED BY THE REV.

JAMES HASTINGS, D.D.

EDITOR OF
'THE EXPOSITORY TIMES' 'THE DICTIONARY OF THE BIBLE'
'THE ENCYCLOPÆDIA OF RELIGION AND ETHICS'
AND OTHER WORKS

ASSISTED BY B. A. CLARK.

PSALMS II.

THE 'SPEAKER'S BIBLE' OFFICES
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The aim of THE SPEAKER'S BIBLE is to preserve all that is worth preserving of the modern interpretation of the Bible. It is the thought rather than the expression that is retained, though the expression has not been rejected when it seemed worthy. So much, however, has been done in the way of condensing, rearranging, rewriting, adding to, and illustrating, that the sources have not as a rule been given. But so far as these are published sermons, they will be found in the Index to Modern Sermons which accompanies each volume. THE SPEAKER'S BIBLE contains also much that is new, written by the Editor and others.

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THE SPEAKER'S BIBLE

THE BOOK OF PSALMS.

From the Local to the Universal.

A contrast of Psalm xiv. with Psalm liii.

THERE are two Psalms which, except in one particular, are absolutely the same—the same ideas, the same words, concluding also with the same aspiration—Psalms xiv. and liii. Those who were responsible, under God, for bringing together the entire Book of Psalms as we have it might very well have rejected one or other of these two Psalms as being redundant; but they allowed them both to stand in spite of their similarity, which is almost identical, and I wish to believe that it was for the sake of that one particular in which, with all their likeness, they differ. 'There is not much difference,' said a working-man to the late Professor James of Harvard,—'there is not much difference between one man and another, but what difference there is is very important.' That is very true: it is the things in which we differ that disclose our personality. We are individuals not because of what we have in common, but because of what we have in contrast.

What, then, is the particular on which these two Psalms, which are almost verbally alike, separate from one another? It is this: in the earlier Psalm, the fourteenth, the Supreme Power is called Jehovah—Jahveh, which we translate as 'the Lord': in Psalm liii. the Supreme Power is called throughout Elohim —God.

In what follows I go upon the assumption that that is not a merely casual distinction; that, on the contrary, it marks the ascent of the religious spirit from a local and national and partial idea of God to an idea ethical, universal, and eternal. In Psalm xiv. our eyes are confined to the fortunes of Israel as a nation; in Psalm liii. we are invited to lift up our eyes over the whole earth. In Psalm xiv. the welfare of Israel as a distinct community is the end and the object of our thought and of our prayers. Psalm liii. embraces the whole world in the righteous grasp of God.

Now this is the order of progress—from the particular to the universal; from what has proved true and necessary in the narrower field of our own experience as individuals or as separate communities to what must be true on the scale of this wide world, and of every world within God's universe.

It is not a thing to be ashamed of, or to apologise for, that the religious soul has advanced in the knowledge of its own ideas, that it has gone on from less to more, that at length it has perceived that what is true for itself is true for the whole world, and that, to put it conversely, that cannot be true for itself which cannot be held to be true for the whole world. We can trace everywhere in the Bible signs of what must have been a great and glorious struggle between what was merely tribal and local, or at the best national, in the

faith of Israel, and what was permanent and universal in that faith. It must have been a long and hard struggle, as the struggle to a nobler idea of life always is. For there is no action of the human soul which demands such bravery, such utter faith, as to let go our hold of some truth, and for one dizzy moment to have no hold of anything, in order that we may lay hold of that same truth nearer to the heart of things, nearer to God. To feel that the God who loves us, who has been our special Providence, is not confined to us but has His purposes with all men—that is a truth which even now it is hard for men to receive, and it is a truth which, in the childhood of any race, even good men have shrunk from, for it seemed to them the loss of everything.

There is a great deal to be said for the view —to put this matter in the language of a warm and convinced faith—that God has committed to small nations, and to nations inhabiting mountainous and easily defended territory, the task of watching over the cradle of great ideas, and of nursing those ideas into youth and manhood. The idea of God, the agony and the glory alike which come from the direct relation between a holy God and the subtleties and weaknesses of the human soul—that seems to have been the task which the Eternal Spirit committed to Israel. To Greece, the Eternal Spirit seems to have committed the task of training the mind of man until it should perceive, and allow itself for ever to be guided or rebuked by, absolute standards in the region of intellectual truth and physical beauty. And it ought to be no mere matter of boasting or vanity on our part who believe that so it is, it ought to be the acceptance of a grave and responsible career among the nations of the earth, that to us in these islands, girt and defended by seas, God committed the task of finding a formula for human government, making of our islands the early home of an ordered and responsible people.

But a nation attains to its manhood, and shows itself ready, if God wills, to undertake some further task in the region of ideas, when it sees quite clearly, and rejoices to see, that the things which have been given to it are given not for its own private sake, but in order that they may become the common light and wisdom and amenity of the whole world.

'When I was a child,' said the Apostle, 'I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man I put away childish things.' That should be the autobiography of every soul, and it should be the autobiography of every great people. It is true that we learned the great and deep things of life within narrow walls, in the chambers of our own soul, under the roof of our own home, within the frontiers of our own country; but if what we have learned be true indeed, a day comes when we know that the only vindication of the truth we have learned is that we are ready to share it with the world, believing that it will bless the world to possess our truth as it has blessed us to this day.

As a nation let us banish from our own speech and from our own souls every ideal or ambition which ministers exclusively to our own vanity. Let us avoid the superstition of the tribal or national God. Let us be assured that only that survives which is in harmony with the true nature of things. Believing, as we do, that it is one Eternal Spirit which is in all and through all and over all, let us live by words, by ideas, by ambitions of such a kind, and of such a kind only, that were God pleased to grant them to us, not we ourselves only but the whole round earth would prosper with our prosperity and would be illumined by our light.

The prophet Isaiah, presuming to speak on behalf of God, gave a message to his own countrymen at a crisis in their fate in words which embody an abiding principle, words, also, which state the very conditions on which God maintains any people in power. The words are: 'This people have I formed for myself: they shall show forth my praise.' 'This people have I formed for myself,'—that is our standing, the sum and the loftiest interpretation of our history. 'They shall show forth my praise'—that is our task, that is our very business in this world.[1]

[1] J. A. Hutton, *Our Only Safeguard*, 75ff.

Duty and God.

Ps. xiv. 1.—'The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.'

THE longer one lives the more clearly does one realize that the deadliest want of belief springs from selfishness in one form or other, from the desire to escape difficult duty, the desire to escape the claims of the present hour in the interests of some kind of self-indulgence. The voice of all duty is a Divine voice. No man can shut his ears to the voice of duty without whispering in his heart, 'There is no God.' Let such a spirit once become a more or less habitual occupant of a human soul, and it is wonderful with what growing success it can make a mind its subject and its minister, so that gradually the worse appears the better reason and the Divine messages from the world without become slowly changed into damning proofs that the whispered falsehood is a truth.

1. The message of *Nature* is no longer Divine: it becomes diabolic. The aspect of the social life around a man exhibits no more the working of a principle making for righteousness, but simply the success of scheming hypocrisy and clever sham, and the sure failure of simple unaided worth. Nay, the very consequences of a man's own selfish conduct seem to work only for good. How true the fateful words, 'To the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward.' Such a man looks upon Nature and says, 'There is no God'; and Nature echoes, 'No.' 'Look,' she says, 'at the sufferings, the woeful sores and cruel wounds under my fair green robe. Look the closer and you will but see piled on one another for ages the records of struggle and pain. Or see over the wide surface of my flower embroidered garments how in all corners, for hunger or for sport, my creatures destroy or torment each other.' Nature thus echoes the whisper of the man who has said in his heart, 'There is no God.' How different her aspect to him in whose full heart dwells the Divine Spirit of an all-wise Father's love; who can believe, amid much that is dark and perplexed and veiled, that still all things work together for good; above all, who sees through the mist of his tears for others' woe that green hill far away, that cross, the symbol of a Divine sufferer whose anguish is an all-embracing sympathy with the world's sorrow, and who so identifies Himself with that sorrow that He cries in the agony of love, 'My God, why hast thou forsaken me?'

Listen to Keats—

But I saw too distinct into the core
Of an eternal fierce destruction,
And so from happiness I far was gone.
Still am I sick of it, and tho', to-day,
I've gathered young spring-leaves, and flowers gay,
Of periwinkle and wild strawberry,
Still do I that most fierce destruction see,
The Shark at savage prey,—the Hawk at pounce,—
The gentle Robin, like a Pard or Ounce,
Ravening a worm.—Away, ye horrid moods!
Moods of one's mind!

Contrast with that these lines of Cowper—

One spirit—His
Who wore the platted thorns with bleeding brows—
Rules universal nature. Not a flow'r
But shows some touch, in freckle, streak, or stain,
Of his unrivall'd pencil. He inspires
Their balmy odours, and imparts their hues,
And bathes their eyes with nectar, and includes,
In grains as countless as the sea-side sands,
The forms with which he sprinkles all the earth.
Happy who walks with him! whom what he finds
Of flavour or of scent in fruit or flow'r,
Or what he views of beautiful or grand
In nature, from the broad majestic oak
To the green blade that twinkles in the sun,
Prompts with remembrance of a present God!

2. Secondly, to the atheist of the text the aspect of *human society* gives back the echo, 'There is no God.' For to the man who looks upon man without reverence, and hope, and large belief there will always appear less and less of the Divine in the human. Suspect human nature, and you will be sure to have your suspicions confirmed. Expect to find little good in men, and you will always find less. Take a base estimate of human motives, and you will always find them baser than you thought. We find in this world that which we bring with us the power to see. It is only the pure in heart who see good. What is called worldly wisdom and shrewdness is too often the mere symptom and consequence of spiritual blindness. To believe in God and to have the true vision for Divine things is to believe in man even after you have been a thousand times deceived, and to see good in the very heart and centre of evil itself. On the other hand, there are professing Christians among us whose Christianity seems to make them only more unbelieving, and who have their doubts about the salvation of everyone except themselves. They go about the noonday world like the old Greek cynic, searching with a lantern for one honest man besides themselves, and reaping the righteous retribution of that kind of search in this—that finding becomes more and more difficult. Whatever that man's profession be, he is an atheist, and the publicans and the harlots enter into the Kingdom of Heaven before him. He has virtually said in his heart, 'There is no God,' and that is why he cannot find the image of God in the lives of the men and women around him.

¶ Faith in man is a duty as well as faith in God; in fact, our general conduct every day in our intercourse with our fellow-beings depends at every turn on our faith in our fellow beings. When that faith ceases, society ceases with it, and a rule not of men with moral natures, but of tigers and foxes in the guise of men, commences with it.[1]

3. Lastly, there are those who look upon *their own life* and receive only confirmation of the same words. Here, too, the wish is father to the thought, and experience and observation tend but to strengthen the woeful falsehood. The seeming impunity of long years of selfishness, the sight of prosperous wrong, successful hypocrisy and unpunished baseness, tend but to reflect the atheism of an unrenewed heart. Because visible justice is so seldom seen to overtake the careful sinner, because the cry of oppressed brotherhood so seldom disturbs the sleep of respectable social cruelty, because honest worth is so often trampled in the dust, because gilded worthlessness so often rides prosperously in state amid the applause of men, the fool hugs to his soul the inference, 'There is no God.' How apt we all are to measure sin by the visible consequence of sin, to measure righteousness by the equivalent it can command in the vulgar market of the world. How few of us are wise enough to see that wrong never can become right; that, in the words of the German poet, 'every wrong has, in the moment of its perpetration, its own avenging angel'; that deadened sensibilities to good constitute the most real hell of a human soul; that falseness of word, or act, or thought breeds falseness, and creates a fearful appetite that grows by what it feeds on; that cruelty, injustice, unkindness, want of consideration for the good of brother or sister will make, under all masks of respectability and popular estimation, a real fiend of man or woman; that impurity, even in thought, increases by the working of a natural law, until the holiest and divinest feelings of a human soul are blunted, and all fine ambitions, all fine sympathies are killed, and the inner life becomes a foul charnel-house haunted by the unclean spirits of vile associations and memories. Unless we keep ever burning upon the altar of our heart the pure fires of a vital belief in goodness and in God, what fools are we even for the life that now is, self-despoiled for those high sympathies and self-denying charities and efforts and hopes that clothe our earthly life with the colours of heaven, and transfigure the human with the light of the Divine.

[1] *Day Book of John Stuart Blackie*, 116.

He knew he was a clever man
Compared with other men,
So thought that God could form no plan
Which was beyond his ken.

He turned to Nature, and made known
How she had made herself;
Nor guessed the Potter's Hand alone
Can change and shape the delf.

He proved that man is nothing more
Than educated sod;
Unheeding that the schoolmen's lore
Is foolishness with God.

He showed that God is but a kind
Of fundamental Cause
Nor dreamed it takes a perfect Mind
To fashion perfect laws.

He taught that human love is just
A sentimental whim;
Forgetting that God took the dust
And made it like to Him.

So, when he'd proved it all, he died
To put it to the test;
He faced the God he had denied—
And no man knows the rest.[1]

The Citizen of Zion.

Ps. xv. 1.—'Lord, who shall sojourn in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?'

Who is worthy to be a citizen of Zion? Such is the question to which this short and well-known Psalm supplies the answer. Who is worthy to dwell in the immediate presence of Jehovah, to enjoy His protection and blessing? The Psalmist asks his question figuratively: 'Lord, who shall sojourn in thy tent, and who shall dwell in thy holy hill?' The word 'sojourn' here means 'stay as a guest.' Hospitality in Eastern countries is a virtue that is highly esteemed; and a traveller who comes on his journey to the tent of an Arab will be entertained by him, and while he is with him will be sure, even though he be a stranger, of his host's protection and friendship. It is from this custom that the Psalmist borrows his figure; he means to say, Who will have the right to sojourn as a guest in Jehovah's tent, and enjoy the protection and friendship which his acceptance there would afford him? In the next line he uses a rather stronger term: 'Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?' that is, who shall be accepted, not as a passing guest only, but as a permanent dweller on God's holy hill? Dwelling on God's holy hill is a figure derived from the custom of resorting to the Temple—the spot chosen by God for His abode upon earth—for worship, and means enjoying the privilege of being constantly near to God or of holding communion with Him. Who, the Psalmist asks, will enjoy God's protection, and the privilege of constant access to Him? In what follows, the character of the man to whom God will grant these privileges is drawn out in detail.

Twice besides in this Psalm—once in the 24th and once in the 101st—the same thought is expressed: 'Who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?' The answer is remarkable as expressing, in language so clear that a child may understand it, the great doctrine that the only service, the only character which can be thought worthy of such a habitation, is that which conforms to the laws of truth, honesty, humility, justice, love. Three thousand years have passed, Jerusalem has fallen, the Jewish monarchy and priesthood and ritual and religion have perished; but the words still remain, with hardly an exception, the rule by which all wise and good men would measure the worth and value of men.

The 15th Psalm has been called 'the Gentleman's Psalm.' And who would deny that it paints to perfection the portrait of the gentleman—the man of integrity, truth, fairness, gentleness, who does right and brave things, but hates to boast of them, the man whose naked word is his bond. Listen to the description: First, the man must be conscientious, one who walks by principle, not convenience, who is, in particular, a truth-

[1] Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler, *Love's Argument, and other Poems*, 106.

speaker. Next, his tongue must be under command; he does not backbite, that is, say injurious things about his neighbour behind his back; he does not slander his neighbour or, to use here the Bible version, does not take up a reproach against him, that is, does not pass on scandals when he hears them. Again, he is modest; he setteth not by himself, but is lowly in his own eyes. Also he is honest, and keeps his word, once it has been passed, though it be to his own loss. Last, he is at once kind and just; he does not give his money upon usurious interest (a special Eastern form of oppression); nor, when he is a judge, does he take reward against the innocent; his verdict cannot be bought.

How closely the traits of the perfect man in the 15th Psalm come out in the accepted picture of the perfect knight, who vowed—

To ride abroad, redressing human wrongs,
To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,
To honour his own word as if his God's.

How like they are, the Knight of the Round Table, the Modern Gentleman, and the man whom the Hebrew poet thought fit to rest on God's holy hill.

Is this, then, the Christian ideal of manhood? It is, if we put the full Christian value into it and keep correcting it by the example of Christ. For even the noblest moral standards (and that which bears the name of gentleman is one of the very noblest) are sure in time to be lowered, perverted, degraded, to become the excuse for the narrowness of a caste, an opportunity for the pride of a class, unless they are for ever being corrected by the standard which is God's, and of which they are but the copies and the echoes. If we look into it, we shall see that the character which we call 'gentle' is really rooted in the same beliefs in which is rooted the character we call 'Christian.' The law of noble manners is a law of forgoing self for the sake of the good of others. What other is the law of the Christian life? It is only by remembering this, only by constantly correcting our ideas of what a gentleman should do by our knowledge of what the follower of Christ may do that we can keep pure 'the grand old name of gentleman.' And if we want to be the man of honour, we can be sure of making good our claim only by remembering always to be also the man of Christ.

¶ My father was a true gentleman, not only in his manner, but in his inner thought and feeling; a man of fine ideal and of conduct, with a large and beautiful humanity, and at the same time with a courtesy and gentleness of manner which never left him. And all this, be it remembered, was, in a sense, the product of the family inheritance under the influence of his own father, and of the Christian circle in which his early life was spent; but it was also the result of faithful cultivation of his varied intellectual and social gifts under the inspiration of a noble religious faith.[1]

Truthfulness.

Ps. xv. 2.—'He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart.'

In the life of many a busy man, from the moment he rises in the morning till he lies down at night, scarcely an hour passes in which he is not tempted to be untruthful, to tell or act a lie. If he never falls for a moment, never swerves an inch from the straight line, he must be a man of most exceptional strength of character.

¶ In the course of a conversation lately a schoolmaster of long standing made the remarkable statement to me that he did not believe he had ever known a boy who would absolutely refuse to tell a lie to get out of a really awkward situation or escape severe punishment. Another schoolmaster who was present agreed with him. I hope it is a gross over-statement of the facts, but coming from such a source it deserves serious attention, and at least indicates the tendencies to deceitfulness that are in most of us from early life onward.[2]

[1] L. Paton, *John Brown Paton*, 18.
[2] J. S. Rutherford, *The Seriousness of Life*, 110.

1. Let us begin by considering the ordinary intercourse which we hold with one another as we go about our work or as we meet in the street or in one another's houses. Let each of us think a little about our own general conversation? Do we always keep strictly to the truth? We are telling a number of friends something that has happened a few days ago; naturally we wish to make a good impression, and a very slight alteration of what actually happened will place us in an extremely favourable light, while at the same time it will do no one else any harm. Do we keep strictly to the truth? Or a question is sprung on us suddenly and unexpectedly: it is rather an awkward one, one perhaps that ought not to have been asked. It is quite easy, with a little innocent and harmless invention, to pass it over. Do we keep strictly to the truth? Or we have done something we ought not to have done. If our employers hear about it, we shall lose our situation. If our parents hear about it, it will distress them terribly. If our best friend hears about it, perhaps he will give us up; yet we cannot possibly hide it without telling a lie. Do we keep strictly to the truth? It is by no means so simple and easy an affair to be truthful as it might seem at first sight. The temptation is sometimes so strong, and the lie so easy; it seems of so little importance, comes out so readily, that we can almost persuade ourselves into believing that somehow we are not responsible for telling it.

¶ Society would be much improved by the infusion of Christian sincerity into its speech. We tell lies, we write lies, and we act lies. The post will not go away to-morrow that will not probably convey a false impression to the most of people who receive our communications. We tell people we are glad to see them, when we are exceedingly sorry. We say we shall be most happy to do so and so, when all the time in our hearts we are regretting that ever we were asked to do anything of the kind. It is at this point that our Christian profession should come upon us with accusing force, reproaching us, and exciting our conscience to the highest point of retribution.[1]

[1] J. Parker, *Detached Links*, 282.

2. There is one form of untruth which is very common—the spreading of scandal. A man's character is the most precious thing he possesses. Rob him of it and it does not matter much what else you leave. Unfortunately it is a kind of robbery that is frequently perpetrated by quite respectable and otherwise decent people, without their even being aware of what they are doing. Yet the lie will go forth, to be repeated again and again in different circles. The lie, we say; for though it may not have been told maliciously, though the person who told it was sure it was true, or thought he could infer its truth from certain facts, still he was stating what he could not prove, and he was stating it at the peril of another's character. To do that is quite as dishonest as to rob a man of his money, and it may be far more serious in its consequences. 'A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold.'

¶ While Miriam was in the Garrison, the Army suffered violent attacks from a certain section of the press. She was pained to hear the names of her grandfather and her father derided by bar loungers; but her tact often won over ignorant hostility to goodwill, her pure face and slight figure standing out in strange contrast to the sordid surroundings. 'Look here, men,' she would say cheerfully, 'do you think it is quite fair to run down absent people? Now, tell me, do any one of you *know* General Booth? No? Well, I know some one who actually lives in his house; she is a thoroughly good woman, and she tells me General Booth is a good, straight man, and I believe her!' Thus she left many a group in a changed temper; but slipping out of the swing doors into a quiet street, she would wipe away hot tears, while she murmured, 'What a cruel thing slander is!'[1]

3. Let us pass to the business world. No one can deny that there must be many positions in business where the temptation to be not perfectly honest is very strong, and some where the temptation becomes so strong that it is well-nigh an impossibility to resist it.

[1] Mrs. Lieut.-Colonel Carpenter, *Miriam Booth*, 69.

In that case there is only one course open to an honest man: he must give up his position, no matter what it may cost him. But in cases where it is hard to be honest but not impossible, it by no means follows that we should give up our post. It may be God's will that we should remain at it and strengthen ourselves through trial, learn to resist temptation and keep our honour untarnished in spite of all inducements to the contrary. We may be in business, for example, on our own account, and there may be circumstances where being honest may mean a customer's leaving us to go to someone who is less scrupulous. Or we may be a salesman or saleswoman getting a commission on everything we sell. A little exaggeration, a little colouring and misrepresentation—that is all that is needed, and the article will be sold. Supposing that by our honesty we do now and then lose? Why, that is a possibility that everyone of us who has determined to be truthful must face sooner or later: and it is a very poor type of honesty indeed that is honest only when it pays and because it pays.

In regard to business, there is another aspect that needs looking into—the truthfulness of the customer. We in front of the counter sometimes forget that we have our responsibilities. If we say that we can get quite as good an article elsewhere at a lower price, when we know perfectly well we cannot; or that the last thing we bought did not wear as well as it ought to have done, when it did; or that we can do without something this season that we have not the remotest intention of doing without—then it is we who are dishonest, and not the salespeople. If we expect them to be honest with us we ought to be at least as honest with them. Moreover, we have no right to put temptation in their way by asking them questions which it may be difficult for them to answer truthfully. We have eyes of our own and we ought to be able to estimate the value of an article for ourselves, and to form our own opinion upon it without putting the unfortunate person behind the counter through a cross-examination. If we are buying anything of importance that we cannot judge for ourselves, surely the wisest and most sensible plan is to bring a friend along with us who can.

¶ R. is a young man about thirty years of age. Until recently he was employed in one of the motor firms in Belfast. Two or three years ago he was sent south to sell a second-hand car to a country clergyman. Before he reached Dublin something went wrong, and he had to spend a considerable time there repairing and overhauling the machinery. 'This isn't going to be much of a bargain,' he thought. When he arrived at his destination the clergyman gave him a friendly welcome, and after having had something to eat, they looked over the car and had a run in it. The clergyman then turned to R. and said, 'Now, as a friend, would you advise me to buy this car? Do you think it is really a good bargain?' R. had driven it 200 miles and if he did not sell it he would have to drive it back 200 miles, and as he said to me, 'You can't drive a car 400 miles for nothing.' If he had told the clergyman exactly what he thought, he would certainly not have bought it; and if his employers had heard the reason why he did not do so, they would have dismissed R. What should he have done? What he did do was to 'hedge.' He said that of course the car was not a new one, but that there was no reason why it should not stand a good deal of wear, and after trying to beat down the price a little, the clergyman bought the car. My point in telling this story is not so much to illustrate the difficult position in which a salesman will sometimes find himself as to point out the kind of question a purchaser ought never to ask. A moment's reflection would have made it evident to the clergyman that in asking the question he did he was putting an undue strain on R.'s sense of honour, and taking an unfair advantage of his own previous hospitality. He was perfectly justified in making the most thorough inquiries as to the condition of the machinery; after that, he should have taken the responsibility of deciding as to the value of the car entirely on his own shoulders.[1]

[1] J. S. Rutherford, *The Seriousness of Life*, 120.

The Excellent.

Ps. xvi. 3.—'The excellent, in whom is all my delight.'

The Psalmist lived in a period when belief in the reality of many gods was still strong, and when a man who would follow the one true God had to do so against the attractions of other deities and against the convictions of a great number of his fellow countrymen. That stage of religion is so distant from our own that we may imagine the Psalmist's example to be of no practical value for our faith, yet in such an imagination we should be very much mistaken, for, to begin with, consider how much we owe to-day to those believers who so many centuries ago rejected all the gods that offered themselves except the true God, and who chose to cleave to Him alone with all the passionate loyalty that breathes through these verses. But for them we could not be standing where we are in religion to-day. As the eleventh chapter of Hebrews reminds us, we are the spiritual heirs of such believers. It is greatly owing to their struggles and their faith and their victories that we have been born into an atmosphere in which no religious belief is possible to us save that in one God who is Spirit and Righteousness and all Truth.

That, then, was the great choice that the Psalmist's faith was turning to—a choice that was no mere assent to a creed that had been fought for and established by previous generations of believers. It was the man's own proving of things unseen, and his own preference of these against the crowd and a system of things seen, palpable, and very powerful in their attraction for the senses of humanity. But we are not to suppose that the rival deities from which this man turned to the unseen God were to his mind, or to the mind of his day, the heap of dead and ugly idols which we know them to be. They were no dead things that he could kick away with his feet that he had to reject when he sought the living God, but things that he and his contemporaries felt to be alive and powerful; powerful alike in their seduction and in their vengeance. They were believed to be identical with the forces of Nature, they were supposed to be indispensable to the welfare of the individual and of society, and they were fanatically supported at the time by the mass of this man's own countrymen. To break from idols in those days, therefore, meant to abandon ancient opinions and habits, to resist many pleasant and natural temptations, and to incur the hostility, as was believed, of the powers of Nature. It was to break with customs and with rites that had fortified and consoled the individual heart for generations, and had been the support and sanction of society and of the State as well.

Yet this man did it. From all that living crowd and system, from all those visible temptations and terrors, he turned to the Unseen, fully conscious of his danger, for he opens his Psalm with a great cry, 'Preserve me, preserve me, O God'; but yet deliberately, and with all his heart: 'I have said unto the Lord, thou art my Lord.' I have no goodness, no happiness, that is outside Thee or outside the saints that are in the land, 'the excellent in whom is all my delight.'

Here we touch another great characteristic of all true faith, which is full of example for ourselves. It is remarkable how, when a man really turns to God, he turns to God's people as well, and how he includes them in the loyalty and in the devotion which he feels toward his Redeemer. His confidence and the sensitiveness of his faith in and toward God become almost an equal confidence and an equal sensitiveness toward his fellow believers.

So it is throughout Scripture. Another Psalmist tells us how he had been tempted to doubt God's providence and God's power to help the good man—'How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High? Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain and washed my hands in innocency.' He immediately adds: 'If I had said, I will speak thus: behold I had dealt treacherously with the generation of thy children.' If I had spoken

thus, denying God, I had dealt treacherously with the generation of God's children. Unbelief toward God meant to him treason toward God's people.

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews affirms the same double character of true faith when he emphasizes just these two points in the faith of Moses: 'choosing to suffer affliction with the people of God,' and 'enduring as seeing him who is invisible.' And God Himself, through Jesus Christ, has accepted this partnership of His people in our loyalty—'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.'

¶ I do not believe in the full faith of any man who does not extend the loyalty he professes to God to God's people as well, who does not feel as sensitive to his brethren on earth as he does to his Father in Heaven, who does not practise piety toward the Church as he does toward her Head, or find in her fellowship and her service a joy and a gladness which is one with his deep joy in God his Redeemer. Nay, is it not just in loving people who are still imperfect, often disappointing, and far from their ideal, it may be, that in our relations to them we are to find the greater proof and test of our religious faith? In these days such a duty is unfortunately more complicated than with the Psalmist. The line between God's Church and the world is not so clear as it was to him, and the Church is divided into many and often hostile factions. All the more it becomes the test of our religion if our hearts feel and rejoice in the fellowship of God's simpler and more needy and more devoted believers, however unattractive they may otherwise be.[1]

A Sorrowful Exchange.

Ps. xvi. 4.—'Their sorrows shall be multiplied that exchange the Lord for another God' (RV).

What are some of these other gods?

1. There are *artistic ideals* which many exalt to the rank of gods. According to some, the worship of 'Beauty' is the most rational form of devotion. Now we need not underestimate the artistic potentialities of human nature. Incalculable good would result from a wise, universal culture of what Burke calls 'the arts that beautify and polish life.' Beauty is the shadow of the Divine. In the past, Christians have been slow to recognize the humanizing and uplifting tendencies of agencies not necessarily connected with Christianity. For ages forces have existed in our civilization—not distinctly related to religion—which have stimulated and strengthened the noblest capacities and hopes of the soul. An intelligent and intensified consciousness that these forces and gifts involve sacred trusteeship is a great need of the Churches. It is essentially Christian to 'covet earnestly the best gifts' of civilization. But God forbid that our artistic and humanitarian progressionists should forget the 'more excellent way' of the Apostle Paul! Our crowning passion should be to 'follow after charity.' The supremest gift of Heaven is love, and only the personal realization of this love can make our loftier aspirations secure against disappointment. A man, rich in imagination, wealthy in ideas, but who is not a conscious possessor of Eternal Love, is a spiritual pauper. What fearful reflex consequences flow on the soul of the man who exchanges the Everlasting for the temporal, the Spiritual for the technical, the Highest for the high!

¶ Jowett's first sermon as minister of St. James's Church was in the nature of a manifesto of his faith. It was preached from the text, 'I am determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.' . . . In what *The Newcastle Chronicle* reporter describes as ' a very able sermon' Jowett showed his facility for illustration and imagery. Aestheticism and the love of the beautiful might be a magnificent endowment, he was arguing, but it might be a snare and a very power of darkness. 'The sculptor might chisel out an angel and yet be a fiend. The painter might exquisitely paint the Lord's Supper and be a very Judas himself. The poet might sing of love and heaven and yet be the victim of appetite and passion.' How

[1] G. A. Smith.

familiar and how Jowett-like these phrases ring. 'They must turn from the crucifix to the Cross, and against the æstheticism which made the Cross a mere decoration they must lift up the stern reality and build up the Gospel of the Son of Man, of the Son of God, Christ Jesus and Him crucified.' [1]

2. There are *philosophic idols* whose altars are covered with the oblations of science and culture. According to many, the Great Unknown has superseded the Universal Father. To such, Christianity is made of mysticism, fanaticism; it is largely a doctrine of echoes, the Church being merely a sounding-board, and so-called 'revelations' only the reverberations of the voices of bygone ages. We admit that the existence of God has been advocated in a manner which, from a forensic and scientific point of view, may be riddled with the pellets of criticism. Our religion should be divested of all its irrational features. But when the last vestige of superstition is stripped away from Christianity, there remains a Divine residuum which it is essentially irrational to ignore. The Jehovah of revelation is demanded by reason. The avowal of a blank ignorance of God is a decisive and pathetic proof of a disordered mental mechanism. They intensify their grief who allow the 'perhaps' or the indefinite 'something' of the scientific agnostic to usurp the throne of the Absolute Deity revealed by Christ.

There are, too, Christian philosophers who have practically exchanged Jehovah for another God. In the Churches we find sentimentalists whose object of worship is an infinite emotionalism; sectarians who have converted the boundless ocean of Infinite Love into a narrow ecclesiastical channel; pantheists who believe in a doctrine of Divine immanence which makes free will and moral responsibility impossible. But the practical result of all these substitutions for the 'God of love' is an indescribable intensification of sorrow.

3. There are *secular deities* that are being practically substituted for Jehovah. Christianity is accused of obstructing real social progress; humanitarian ideals are realizable only by material means. The inculcators of this theory 'spell God with a small g' and exchange Providence for utilitarianism. Liberty, equality, and fraternity are to be secured by an altruistic enthusiasm generated by reason and knowledge. Now Mr. Benjamin Kidd assures us that the brotherhood of the age is the direct product of Christ. Oh that our secularists who would 'build a city that hath foundations' would learn this lesson! They multiply their sorrows who reject the Christ that stimulates, sustains, and sanctifies our social aspirations. True religion puts a 'wholly new system of nerves into every virtue.' The true passion for the establishment of better material and moral conditions is kindled at the altar of religion and not at the shrine of secularism.

¶ The reading of Dumont's interpretation of Benthamism in the *Traité de Législation* effected an astounding change in Mill's outlook on life. He laid down the last volume with the feeling that he was literally 'converted.' 'I now had opinions,' he cried, 'a creed, a doctrine, a philosophy; in one among the best senses of the word, a religion; the inculcation and diffusion of which could be made the principal outward purpose of a life. And I had a grand conception laid before me of changes to be effected in the condition of mankind through that doctrine.' . . . He preached immediately his radiant gospel of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. With all the ardour of a regenerate he turned to find others of a like persuasion. The Utilitarian Society was founded to embody these purposes; it consisted of young men more or less acquainted with Bentham, and who therefore might be the more readily imbued with the spirit and aims of his teaching. . . .

But this halcyon state was soon disturbed. He began to drift from the certainty of his beliefs, and in the autumn of 1826 a painful reaction followed on his new-found yet short-lived joy. . . . Sudden misgivings and agonizing doubts flashed upon him. His implicit and complacent trust in his philosophical

[1] A. Porritt, *J. H. Jowett*, 51f.

evangel was rudely shattered, and his mission to upraise a world of which he was woefully ignorant was abandoned in despair. For an interval everything on which he had depended tottered and seemed about to fall. He deeply realized that, if all his objects in life could be attained at that moment, the result would give him no lasting satisfaction. He says with melancholy emphasis, 'At this my heart sank within me; the whole foundation on which my life was constructed fell down. All my happiness was to have been found in the continual pursuit of this end. The end had ceased to charm; and how could there ever again be an interest in the means? I seemed to have nothing left to live for.' [1]

Personal Providence.

Ps. xvi. 5.—'The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup.'

God had been everything in the Psalmist's experience. We do not know whether he was a prosperous man or a poor and troubled one. His indifference to all that is striking. But he tells us that what he did have, however little or however much it was, he had from God. 'The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot.' And so, whether poor or prosperous, he could say, 'The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.'

Now that experience of Divine leading is not analysable, but we know that it does grow up, solid and real, in the experience of simple men and women who have put their faith in God, who have taken life as a mission from Him, and who have done their duty by His call. To such men all things do work together for good. Though the world about them shake and darken, they feel their own stability, they have light enough to read the signs of their guided progress, and they know that the Lord Himself is the portion of their inheritance and their cup. He feeds them, and in Him they find all they need to do their work and to develop their manhood.

[1] S. P. Cadman, *Charles Darwin and Other English Thinkers*, 100.

1. There is much in the present experience of men and in the advancing knowledge of the world which appears to render incredible the belief of our fathers in a personal providence. The reasons which are sometimes quoted against such a faith are illusory, and there is nothing that can rob us of such a faith, except, of course, our own moral delinquencies. Every temptation we yield to, every affection we abuse, every wrong use we make of mind or of body, every insincerity of which we are guilty, every piece of scamped work that we allow to leave our hands—these things shake our faith in God and make it increasingly more difficult for us to believe that our life is a mission from Him. But if, having kept ourselves from these things, or if, having fallen into them, we rise in confidence to grasp His saving hand, then there is nothing in the seeming precariousness of human life, or in the advancing knowledge of the world, that really makes us doubt for one instant that we are thought of and cared for by, and carried upon the heart of, the Infinite Unseen, though one often hears assertions to the contrary, and confident anticipations are given, uttered in the name of science, of the time when this or that discovery will show us that there is no room left in the universe for God.

2. Sometimes we hear it put in one or other of two ways: Some day, it is said, a chemist, working in his laboratory, may discover how to combine certain elements and so produce the living matter from which all phenomena of life are ultimately developed. Or it is sometimes put this way—that physicians, natural philosophers, will no doubt in the long run be able to reduce the phenomena of life—not physical only but spiritual and social—to combinations of mechanical forces. Well, for the moment let us suppose that these anticipations are realized. Would the realization of either of them render belief in God any less credible or necessary for us?

Take the first. Suppose that a chemist, by making certain chemical combinations in his laboratory, were at last to produce the living matter from which some assert we are all

developed by natural process, his achievement, surely, would only be an illustration of the fact that thought, purpose, and design, analogous to what he himself was bringing to bear upon the experiment, had always been at work upon Nature from the beginning.

Or suppose the second—that the physicist had at last reduced the phenomena of life to combinations of natural forces—would that rob us of a belief in the infinite heart of love and care behind them?

¶ From a headland on the Ayrshire coast I have watched for several summer holidays night by night the lighting up of the six or seven lighthouses, beacons that open up the Firth of Clyde to mariners and guide them securely on their way. Now those of you who have ever visited a lighthouse are aware that there is no more wonderful instance of the triumph of engineering. Every one of those accurately revolving lights, with its own particular message of warning or of welcome to the sailor, is due to a combination of many mechanical forces. But what would all these amount to, how could these beacons come to work where they do and spell out the intelligible warnings and welcomes which they flash to the eyes that come up from the Atlantic through the night and through the rain, straining for them—how could they have done so and do all this without the mental and moral faculties which put them together and which intended from the beginning their beneficent results? The mechanical forces necessary to achieve one of these great beacons did not come together of themselves. The lighthouse anywhere on our coast means a heart first of all to appreciate the perils against which it has been raised to warn the otherwise helpless mariner; good will to devote thought and material at whatever cost to their construction; a brain to calculate and invent and combine the processes by which their success is at last achieved. I need not detail the meaning of my parable. Should men succeed in expressing all the facts of nature and the processes of history in terms either of chemistry of mechanics, there would still be left room for the cause behind and through them all, for the operation of intelligence and good will, mind, and heart. The loving providence of our God and Father would be as credible, and as necessary to our faith as ever.[1]

Contentment.

Ps. xvi. 6.—'The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places.'

THE words are those of a man wholly contented with his lot in life. His present opportunities are such as to rouse his enthusiasm; his future is a source of joy as he anticipates the good things that line the morrow's pathway.

Genuine contentment is a rarely beautiful characteristic. Not the stagnant contentment that succumbs to environment, but the progressive, lively spirit that is busy availing itself of to-day's opportunities, beating unruly conditions into shape and at the same time anticipating better things for to-morrow. We seem to be hampered by a constitutional perversity which blinds us to the magnitude of our present opportunities and denies contentment much more than a night's lodging in our souls. It is the forbidden that seems the home of opportunity rather than that which is to be had for the asking.

I would have gone; God bade me stay:
I would have worked; God bade me rest.
He broke my will from day to day,
He read my yearnings unexpressed
And said them nay.

Now I would stay; God bids me go;
Now I would rest; God bids me work.
He breaks my heart tossed to and fro,
My soul is wrung with doubts that lurk
And vex it so.

I go, Lord, where thou sendest me;
Day after day I plot and moil:
But Christ my God, when will it be
That I may let alone my toil
And rest with Thee?[2]

[1] G. A. Smith.

[2] Christina G. Rossetti.

Contentment is found only in the assurance that God controls our lot and that for us the best opportunity that we could have to-day is that which we have.

1. The soul of opportunity is contentment. Contentment is concentrated enough and sufficiently keen-eyed to survey thoroughly the immediate landscape. It becomes familiar with all it sees, and learns to use to the best advantage all it touches. It finds treasures in the waste that the careless discard as useless or of small value. After all, opportunity can be found only by those who possess character. There is no opportunity anywhere for the querulous and vicious—they spoil all they touch. They turn a garden into a desert, and make a fruitful tree barren.

¶ Not only is contentment compatible with the desire for greater opportunity and wider powers, it is the condition of their sure attainment. It seeks for better things, not for the sake of gain or ease or pleasure, but in order that life's opportunities may be increased and its work enlarged. It shows a man how to make the best use of what he has, that in becoming the master of greater possessions he may attain a nobler character and render a wider service. La Salle, in the early days of Socialism, blamed the Alsatian peasants because of their 'accursed want of needs.' He knew they were discontented, but he did not think that could be improved except by the struggle for new possessions. He would more surely have led them to a higher and a happier life if, first, he had prepared them for larger opportunities by faithfulness in their present circumstances.[1]

2. Opportunity lies here, not yonder. Place becomes great only because of great personality. Place can never make a small man great—only ridiculous. Big things and places are where big causes and men are. We must apply the best that we are to our tasks. That is the first step. 'Where the heart is there the gods sojourn and not in any geography of fame. . . Here we are; and if we tarry a little, we may come to learn that here is best. See to it, only, that thyself is here; —and art and Nature, hope and fate, friends, angels, and the Supreme Being, shall not be absent from the chamber where thou sittest.'

¶ A little boy was often weary, for he shared the poverty and labour of the farm. But at sunset he found pleasure in sitting on the brow of the hill and looking at a palace far across the valley all ablaze with glory—it was surely a palace, for its windows were gold and diamond. One day he took a journey to the palace and when he reached it, alas, it was only a common farmhouse like his own with windows of glass. But there were warm hearts within which made it a palace. A little playmate gave him a happy day and he told her how he had expected to find there the gold and diamond windows. 'Ah,' she said, 'wait till sunset and I will show you them.' And when evening drew near she pointed across the valley where a distant house lay wrapped in the splendour of the sunset. 'Why,' he said, 'that is my home!' When he reached his father's house after his day of pleasure his parents asked him what he had learned. 'I have learned,' he said, 'that I live in a house with gold and diamond windows.'[1]

[1] *The Spirit of Man*, Selected Essays from *The Times*, ii. 48.

Youth's Heritage.

Ps. xvi. 6.—'I have a goodly heritage.'

In the early days of the French Revolution, when the great cry of 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity' was ringing through France, and all the nations of Europe were beginning to feel the stirrings of new life, the poet Wordsworth in England caught the enthusiasm, and in the first glow of it, cried out, 'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, but to be young was very Heaven.'

In these days youth has come into its own. There was a time when it was a positive handicap for a man to be young. When St. Paul was writing to Timothy, he remembered that

[1] C. H. Brent, *Prisoners of Hope*, 163.

he was quite young, and that, perhaps, on that account his words would not carry much weight with some who heard them; and to rebuke these and encourage Timothy, St. Paul said, 'Let no man despise thy youth.' It was said that Pitt, who became Prime Minister at a very early age, had to defend himself against the 'atrocious crime of being a young man.' Well, all that is past; youth is a handicap no longer. Very often people prefer the enthusiasm and the energy of youth to the experience and wisdom of age.

Many of the great spiritual victories recorded in the Bible are the victories of young men—victories of the youthful Joseph, Joshua, David, or Daniel. And many of the lapses, the stumblings and the defeats are found in those who are older in years—men like Noah, Lot, and Solomon. When we think of it, we remember that some of the most remarkable men the world has seen finished their task and completed their service within the scope of early life. Alexander had won some of his great victories before he was twenty-five, and he was only thirty-seven years of age when he had conquered the tyranny of Persia and completed the conquest of the world. Pitt was only twenty-two when he became a Member of Parliament. Cortes conquered Mexico at the age of thirty. Burns and Raphael were only thirty-seven when they died. Or take the grandest illustration of all—our Lord Himself. His ministry was one of only three years; and all the traditions agree that He was only thirty-three years of age when men nailed Him to the tree; yet what a stupendous work He achieved for all the human race! These are sufficient to remind us that youth is the time of power and of enthusiasm; that there is no breeze so fresh as that which blows from the shores of youth. Every young person ought to be able to say, like the Psalmist, 'I have a goodly heritage.' As Lowell puts it:

> A heritage it seems to me,
> A king might wish to hold in fee.

Now let us notice one or two things that enter into that heritage of youth.

1. First of all there is *physical and intellectual energy.* That does not mean that every young man is energetic. Sometimes the opposite is the case. There are hundreds going to the wall every week just for the lack of a little energy and a little purpose. Sometimes it may be an hereditary taint; sometimes it may be sickness; oftener still it is badly regulated passions that rob opening manhood of its noble heritage. Sometimes young men are energetic about the wrong things. In the Old Book we read about an officer who, in the day of battle, took captive one of the enemy, and delivered him over to one of his own soldiers to keep. But when he came back the prisoner was gone, and the soldier made excuses about it. He said: 'While I was busy here and there, behold the man was gone.' He was not idle; he was not lazy; but he was careless about the main purpose—the main business of his life. It is like that with many men to-day. It is not that they are lacking in energy, but their energy is misdirected. You will find a man who will give you all the information you want on sport, he is great on that, but he is a 'stick' at his own business.

¶ Years ago I had a secretary whose head was full of sport. That young fellow could hardly rest in the office when the result of a county cricket match was hanging in the balance. When the winter came on, he had no memory except for football. My interests were made entirely subordinate to his recreations. One day it was his duty to post a large number of magazines to various addresses abroad. Intent on hurrying to a football match, he sent off every one of those magazines to America, India, and various parts of the world without a single stamp on them! For months afterwards I was receiving letters of complaint from the recipients of those unstamped magazines. Some of them had to pay shillings for the negligence of my clerk. It was only a little thing, but it destroyed all my confidence in him, and proved his unfitness for any responsible work.[1]

[1] D. Williamson, *From Boyhood to Manhood*, 40.

2. Another thing which enters into the heritage of youth is *moral and spiritual strength.* People sometimes speak about young men in such a way as to suggest that, however strong they may be in some directions, in the moral sphere they are absolutely weak and unreliable. That is a libel on youth! It is in the days of youth that the great decisive battles of the soul have to be fought, the victory lost or won; and, just because of that, God has reinforced the moral nature of youth with many powers of which old people are more or less almost destitute. There is, for example, the power of innocence. We have a conscience, tender and sensitive in the days of youth. Cardinal Newman has said, 'Our great security against sin lies in being shocked at it.' He means it lies in having a tender and sensitive conscience. We ought to have that in youth so that we can resist evil at its very beginnings, resist the enemy at the very gate, so that he may get no foothold in the citadel of our heart.

¶ Once, in Glasgow, I saw an interesting sight. I was watching some criminals passing from the court-house into the van which was to bring them away to prison. Among them there was a young woman—perhaps I should have called her a girl—and there she was, with tears in her eyes, hiding her face for very shame. There might have been some question as to her guilt, but there was certainly no question as to her shamefacedness. Just beside her there was an old woman who was absolutely devoid of shame. She shouted to some people she recognized in the crowd; told them she was going to her 'hotel' and so on, and disappeared into the van with a stream of laughter and oaths and jests. One could not help feeling there had been a time in her life when she was like the young creature by her side, hanging her head for shame, but habitual sin had done its work, and now the criminal did not know even how to blush.[1]

3. A third thing that belongs to the heritage of youth is *freedom.* A man who has sinned again and again till the slight chain of habit, at first as light as a gossamer thread, has hardened into links of adamant, has to a large extent lost his freedom. He is a slave of sin; he is bound hand and foot with fetters. There will be times when he loathes his sin, and yet he always feels himself powerless to follow good. Henry Drummond used to say that a man does not often change the shape of his collar after he is forty. Certainly it is very hard for a man after that age to alter the trend and character of his life; but in the days of youth he is free to make his choice. He can say, 'I will take this way—the way of clean living—sure that it will lead me straight to the city of the great King.' In youth he can put his foot on the evil thing; but if he yields to it then it will hold him in a fatal grip in times to come.

¶ In Lloyd Morgan's *Habit and Instinct,* in his scientific analysis of the subject, there is human insight in the observation: 'Herein lies the utility of the restlessness, the exuberant activity, the varied playfulness, the prying curiosity, the inquisitiveness, the meddlesome mischievousness, the vigorous and healthy experimentalism of the young. These afford the raw material upon which intelligence exercises its power of selection.' These fluid energies of youth are like the molten metal which runs out from a blast-furnace into moulds in the sand, which there cools and solidifies; they *must* take some shape or other, settling into regular forms of exercise and then into fixed habits. At first we have full power over the course our thoughts and practices shall take; soon they instinctively repeat themselves; the time comes when we realise that we have solidified for better or worse, in mental and spiritual as well as bodily habits.[1]

4. The last element which enters into the heritage of youth is *its adventurous spirit.* Robert Louis Stevenson has said: 'There are not many Dr. Johnsons to set forth upon his first romantic voyage at the age of sixty-four. If we wish to scale a mountain, or visit a

[1] A. M. MacIver.

[1] R. E. Welsh, *Man to Man,* 128.

thieves' kitchen in the East-end, to go down in a diving dress or up in a balloon, we must be about it while we are still young. It will not do to delay until we are dogged with prudence.' And he goes on to say, 'Youth is the time to see the sun rise in town or country; to be converted at a revival. It is the time of venture.'

¶ Bishop Whipple tells a story of an old man among the North American Indians who was confirmed late in life. His rheumatism made kneeling very painful to him. He said to the Bishop: 'I put it off too long. I ought to have done it when my knees were not rheumatic.' There is a sense in which this incident has a lesson for all of us. It is easier to kneel when one is young: it is easier to consecrate one's life to God before the cares and sins of the world have impaired the soul's vigour.

I would not come when I am old,
Presenting unto God a withered life,
A heart whose energies are growing cold,
And powers unmeet for noble strife.
Now, in the blushing morn of youth,
Help me, O Christ, my little all to give,
To consecrate my every force to truth,
And live to purpose while I live.[1]

Communion.

Ps. xvi. 7.—'I will bless the Lord who hath given me counsel, my reins also instruct me in the night seasons.'

This man held communion with God. He had received what are called inspiration and revelation, and had proved the truth of these in his life. They had not come to him as we often falsely suppose revelation and inspiration exclusively to have come to men of old. The Psalmist tells us of no visions of angels, no voices from heaven. The Lord did not appear to him by sign or in dreams. On the contrary, he tells us very simply that the Divine counsel came to him through the workings of his own inner mental and spiritual life. 'My reins also instruct me in the night seasons.'

Now, according to the primitive physiology of the day, the reins of a man were supposed to fulfil the same mental and spiritual functions of which we now know that the brain is the organ. 'My brains also,' we might put it without straining the meaning of the verse, 'My brains also instruct me in the night seasons.' In other words, God's revelation came to this man through the workings of his mind and conscience. And he adds that it was in the night-time that mind and conscience worked, when he was left to himself, undisturbed by the things which are seen; when he lay alone in the darkness. God made this man's brain, and used it by His Spirit as the instrument of revelation, communing with the man through his reason and conscience, his spiritual and mental faculties.

Do you see how this verse of the Psalm performs its chief service and example to ourselves? We are always in our stupid way contrasting God's common providence and His grace. We are always opposing reason and revelation. To this man they were one; God's grace was shown to him everywhere through His common providence, and God's revelation was ministered to through the reason with which He Himself had endowed His creature. The Psalmist's chief and most practical help to us is that he became sure of God, not by miracle or supernatural sign, but by God's common providence in his life and by God's communion with him through the organs God Himself had created. These are experiences in which every one of us to-day can share.

1. So, whether before or after Christ, these are the ultimate grounds and reasons for faith in God. It was so in the Old Testament: 'Stand in awe and sin not.' 'Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.' 'Be still, and know that I am God.' It was so with our Lord Himself: 'The kingdom of God cometh not with observation, but the kingdom of God is within you.' It was so with St. Paul: 'The Spirit itself beareth

[1] D. Williamson, *From Boyhood to Manhood*, 172.

witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God; and if children then heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.' 'For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father . . . that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, that ye may be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, to the end that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may come with all saints to comprehend what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of God.'

2. But it is no cold or commonplace knowledge that comes to the believer apart from the ministry of angels, and upon the use of his own mind and conscience. For look how these poor imperfect instruments are to be strengthened, and are strengthened, by the touch of God's spirit. 'According,' says St. Paul, 'to the riches of his glory.' Not more sublime was Zechariah's or Ezekiel's vision of God, not more full of melody were the skies above Bethlehem that night Christ was born, than our knowledge of God may be, if only we will let our spiritual natures out, doing justice to the coming of His Spirit, which is always nearer than we think, and more ready to communicate than we are to take.

After all, it has never been better put than in the answer in the Shorter Catechism, 'What is effectual calling?' 'Effectual calling is the working of God's Holy Spirit, whereby, convincing us'—mark the intellectual terms—'convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our will, He doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.' Here is His own word again: 'Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.'

Come in, come in, Thou blessèd One,
My door is open wide;
I would not leave it just ajar,
And then behind it hide.

I do not fear to ask that Thou
Should'st be my Royal Guest,
Nor fear to plead with urgency,
Come in, my King, and rest.

The very hope of Thy response
Kindles my life anew;
A finer atmosphere pervades
My being through and through.

A stronger tide begins to flow
Through this slow-pulsing heart;
The smoking flax begins to blaze,
The brooding thought to start.

Thou comest! blessed be Thy name,
I haste my King to greet,
And do as she of old once did,
Embrace Thy sacred feet.

Thou comest! and the poignant hours
With growing hope speed on;
Saviour and Lord of souls, to-night
Enrich Thy needy one.[1]

God Before.

Ps. xvi. 8.—'I have set the Lord always before me.'

One who keeps God always before him makes discoveries, and many of them. David, in the twenty-seventh Psalm, declares that he has desired one thing, and will seek after that; but that one thing evidently includes a great deal for him. It will reveal to him the beauty of the Lord; it will give him opportunity to ask questions of Divine wisdom; it will afford him a hiding-place in time of trouble, and a means of triumph over his enemies. Let us, then, note a few of the many things which a man finds in God by keeping Him always before his face.

[1] J. E. Livock, *Songs and Lyrics of the Inner Life*, 65.

1. He finds himself revealed. In the Shinto temples in Japan the shrines contain no altars, pulpits, or pictures, but only a circular steel mirror. It would be no inappropriate symbol in a Christian shrine, to set forth the self-revealing power of the word of God. Nor is the symbol without its warrant in Scripture. St. James draws a picture of a man beholding his natural face in a glass, consulting his mirror for some temporary purpose of arranging his dress or hair, and then going his way, and forgetting all about it. And he puts this picture in contrast with another—that of a man stooping down and looking attentively, fixing the impression of what he sees so as to keep it always before his face. This man, who looks steadfastly into God's perfect law, and translates what he sees there into daily practice, this man 'shall be blessed in his going,' keeping God always before his face. The man who studies God studies self at the same time; the man who steadfastly follows Christ learns as much about self as he learns of Christ. Self-knowledge is the hardest kind of knowledge. The thing which is identified with our interest and pleasure is not always the thing which we know best. We shut our eyes to its imperfections; we look at it only on the side where it ministers to our gain or enjoyment; we do not like to pick flaws in the self which we love; we refuse to see that it is fallible and proud, and otherwise faulty: it is ourself, and we stand by it. But when Christ persuades us to deny and lay aside self, He puts self in a position where we can study it from without; where we can weigh and test it by higher standards; where we can set it, with all its greed and conceit and sophistry and littleness, beside the perfect manhood of Jesus Christ, and, in the light of His symmetry and purity, see it as it really is. Hence the Psalmist says, 'Thou hast set our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.' If we would truly know what kind of men and women we are, we must set the Lord always before our face.

2. Setting God before our face carries with it a power of growth. God is not only always before us: He is always going before us, and beckoning us to follow. The man who has his back towards God, like one who has the sun behind him, follows a shadow. The Bible, from one end to the other, is full of growth. It is itself a growth. It is a picture of God leading men. And as we read on, we are impressed with the fact of an advance in humanity. The plane is higher at the beginning of St. Matthew than at the beginning of Exodus; and, moreover, the New Testament especially thrills with the summons to advance and growth: 'Grow in grace.' 'Forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before.' 'Be no more children; but grow up into him who is the head.' 'Press toward the mark for the prize of your high calling.' Constant contact with true greatness and goodness lifts even a small man. Enoch, who walked with God, must have acquired a Divine quality in his manhood. In the very nature of the case, a man who has God always before his face cannot be stationary. A mountain is a constant temptation to climb; and when one has climbed, and caught a view of still higher summits beyond, he is restless until he has climbed them too. The vision of God ever draws us on with sweet and powerful allurements. The more we learn of Him, the more we see to learn; the higher we rise in character, the greater possibilities of character are revealed.

¶ 'Do your converts stand?' asked an enquirer of a missioner with whom we were chatting. 'No!' he replied promptly, 'they go forward!' [1]

3. And the keeping of God constantly before the face engenders hope. Hope, if we are to believe Paul, is the very atmosphere in which a Christian lives and breathes. 'We are saved by hope.' The creation is indeed 'subject to vanity' but 'in hope' that it shall be 'delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.' There are sufferings of this present time; but God also is in this present time, alike as a fact

[1] *The Happy Christian*, 59.

and as a promise of glory to be revealed.

Amid the darkness and vagueness which encircled the Old Testament future, this Psalm is like a sweet flute-note amid the crash and discord of a vast orchestra. Is there anything more winning, more soothing, than these verses, which put the whole future in God's hands with such serene trust and sure confidence that all will be well for ever and ever? I have not been moved, and 'I shall not be moved'; because the Lord is 'at my right hand.' Because He is at my right hand, my happiness is secure; for 'at his right hand are pleasures for evermore. In his presence is fulness of joy.' I shall not wander in the dark and devious ways which lead to death, for 'thou wilt shew me the path of life.' Death and the grave frighten me not: 'thou wilt not leave my soul to the unseen world; thou wilt not suffer thy beloved one to see the pit. I have no good beyond thee.' No good beyond thee! Thou includest all good; the remotest future will not carry me beyond Thee; the march of eternity will not overpass Thee; Thou shalt still be continually before my face, age after age, as I shall rise and grow and work on ever longer lines in the atmosphere of heaven, changing, developing, but ever 'into the same image, from glory to glory.' In this world we are often troubled about the future. Sometimes the shadows fall backward, and cloud all our present with gloom: but it need not be so if only we keep the Lord continually before our face; for then we are going forward to God, and after God; and whatever the future may have for us, it will have God, and that is enough.

I shall behold him, one day, nigh.
Assailed with glory keen,
My eyes will open wide, and I
Shall see as I am seen.

Of nothing can my heart be sure
Except the highest, best:
When God I see with vision pure,
That sight will be my rest.[1]

[1] George Macdonald.

The Picture.

Ps. xvi. 8.—'I have set the Lord always before me.'

It is of the greatest importance what that is which is continually before us. That which is constantly in a man's eye must help very largely to shape him. Of certain pictures it has been said that though they were good pieces of art, they were not good pictures to live with. We should not, for example, wish to have hanging up in our sitting-room, and constantly in sight of our children, a picture of Herodias with the head of John the Baptist, or of a crazed mother in the act of murdering her babe. We try to keep pictures of wholesome subjects as well as of beautiful forms before our children's eyes, because we know that they are insensibly educated by familiarity with such things.

¶ One of Robertson's congregation at Brighton used to keep a portrait of the great preacher in the room behind his shop, and when he was tempted to any mean device, he would set the likeness before him, and its influence determined his inclination in the way of truth. But it is not the figure of any earthly personality, however noble and ennobling, which is the object of the Psalmist's contemplation. He 'sets' before him the august and holy presence of God, and in the glory of his most searching light all the Psalmist's affairs are determined.[1]

1. Is not God always before us? Can we help having the Lord always before us? Assuredly we can. The Psalmist evidently thinks so. He does not regard it as inevitable that we should have the Lord always before us. On the contrary he speaks of those who hasten after, or, literally, take unto themselves, another God. Both their course and his are matters of choice. He does not say, 'The Lord is always before me,' but 'I have set him always before me.' His own will, his own act, have had something to do with the matter.

[1] J. H. Jowett, *Brooks by the Traveller's Way*, 10.

He has been at pains to bring God into the foreground, and to keep Him there always. And there is nothing strange in this. Because God manifests Himself in the world, because every common bush is afire with Him, it does not follow that men recognize the fact. There is abundance of sweet music in the world, but there are multitudes of people to whom it means no more than the rumble of the carts in the street. There are men who live all their lives amid the grandest scenery, but who see in it nothing but so much stone and timber: men to whom a great picture is meaningless, and literature as dumb as the pyramids. So it is not strange if men should not see the God who puts Himself before them in His Word and in His providences, in every star and flower and lightning flash. A sense must be educated to see God. The Apostle is only stating what is a familiar fact to us in other departments when he says, 'The natural man discerneth not the things of the Spirit of God. They are foolishness unto him. He cannot know them because they are spiritually discerned!' It is quite as likely, to say the least, that a man's spiritual sense should be uncultivated and dormant, and give him no knowledge of that vast spiritual economy which touches him everywhere, as that his eye or his ear should be unimpressed by pictures of harmony. A babe has the organs of vision, but nevertheless he must learn to see.

2. This keeping of God before the face requires persistency. It is not enough to bring God once or twice into the line of vision; He is to be kept there. The Psalmist tells us not only of an act, but of a habit: 'I have set the Lord always before my face.' Men often claim that they are susceptible to religious impressions, and are disposed to flatter themselves on the fact; and it is a familiar enough fact—it would be strange if it were not so—that God often brings the face of the most unsusceptible man round to Him by some display of His power, or by some stroke of His providence. Jonah tried to run away from God, but met Him in the way to Tarshish: Balaam turned his back on God and his face toward Moab; but the angel of God met him in a narrow place, where there was no chance of turning back. The impressions which men receive under such circumstances are vivid and truthful: the trouble is that they do not expand into permanent convictions. When God sets Himself before a man's face, it is in order to make the man set God continually before his face. The crisis means an experience. A compass-needle would be to a sailor of no more account than a knitting-needle if it were made to point northward by some violent shock; it is the fact of its always pointing thither that gives it its value.

¶ The real practice of the Presence of God is the endeavour to see everything in the light of that Presence, and never to regard anything as detached from the divine relationship. In the flat miles of country round about Lincoln, everything can be viewed in relation to its noble cathedral, uplifted there on the mount. Whether you are toiling in the fields, or walking along the road, or sitting by the way, the cathedral is ever before you, throwing its sacred suggestiveness over every common lot. And to have the Lord always before us on the broad plains of daily life, overlooking our playfields and our battlefields, our place of business and our place of worship, the green pastures and the green churchyard—this is to cultivate the vision of God.[1]

3. This determination to put God in the forefront of life, and to make His will the first and final test of everything, brought to the Psalmist an inexplicable assurance—none the less real because it evades explanation—a guarantee of steadfastness and a prophecy of immortality. And this experience, which all must covet as they look out over the dimly seen and unexplored landscape of the future, may be realized by all who are willing in the same way to pledge themselves to that absolute obedience to God which is at once the grateful expression of a redeemed soul and the truest proof of responsive love. How many have made such a pledge to the Master, say, in the solemn hours of a dawning year, determining

[1] J. H. Jowett, *Springs in the Desert*, 23.

with honest purpose of heart to bring the consecration of the sanctuary out into the street, and to give full emphasis in practical life to the 'always' of their covenant. To all such comes this strengthening certainty of His fellowship who is vested with all power, and who answers to their vow with His own, 'Lo! I am with you alway.' Who can measure the strength of such a partnership? It is the open secret of the only life that is worthy of our high calling, and it determines the high quality and character of all our doings. Hence let us all be certain that such a heart-transaction has been effected between ourselves and our Lord, and that this word is personally true of us, 'I have set the Lord always before me.'

Stability.

Ps. xvi. 8.—'Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.'

'BECAUSE he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved': here is the warranted confidence of a simple faith. The man who clasps God's hand and has Him standing by his side as his Ally, his Companion, his Guide, his Defence—that man does not need to fear change. For all the things that prove the arrogant or mistaken confidences of other men to be insanity or a lapse from faith prove the confidence of the trustful soul to be the very perfection of reason and common-sense.

The man who stands with his back against an oak-tree is held firm, not because of his own strength, but because of that on which he leans. There is a beautiful story of some heathen convert who said to a missionary's wife, who had felt faint and asked that she might lean for a space on her stronger arm, 'If you love me, lean hard.' And if we lean hard because God is at our right hand, we shall not be moved. It is not insanity, it is not arrogance, it is simple faith to look our enemies in the eyes, and to feel sure that they cannot reach us. 'Trust in Jehovah; so shall ye be established.' The man who has God at his right hand may be sure of the unalterable continuance of all his proper good. Outward things may come or go as it pleases Him, but that which makes the life of our life will never depart from us so long as He stands there. And whilst He is there, if only our hearts are knit to Him, we can say, 'My heart and my flesh faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.' I shall not be moved. Though all that can go goes, He abides; and in Him I have all riches.

¶ When the worst storm of his life struck him, his faith still held. One or two tiny memories of that sad time will show what I mean. 'The morning after Sidney was killed,' writes one of the Sisters of the Mission, 'Mr. Collier came down (to the Hall) to take prayers as usual. He commenced to read the Psalm, but broke down and had to leave the room. Mr. Crook, the late treasurer of the Mission, continued to read, but before he finished, Mr. Collier returned and led in prayer without a break in his voice.' 'I heard him preach,' writes another correspondent, 'the Sunday in March 1918, two days before he got the telegram telling him of his son Sidney's death. His subject was "The Anchor that holds." The Sunday following he tried to be as cheerful and encouraging as usual, telling us if his son could speak he would say, "Carry on." He alluded to his sermon of the previous Sunday and said, "I little thought how soon I would be called upon to trust to that Anchor. I am here to-night to tell you, it *does* hold." '[1]

But there is a yet more wonderful and higher application of the words, which results from the closing verses of this Psalm. For the Psalmist passes beyond this confidence that he shall not be moved amid all the changes and possibilities of earthly life, and feels certain that even the great change from life to death will not move him, in so far as his union with God is concerned. It is beautiful to see that, whether the doctrines of a future life and of a Resurrection were part of the common religious possession of his age or no, we catch in this closing strain of the Psalm the religious consciousness of the singer

[1] G. Jackson, *Collier of Manchester*, 166.

in the very act of grasping at the truth which, whether revealed or no to his generation, was, at all events, very imperfectly revealed. Why was he so sure that Death and Sheol—the grave and corruption—were things that he had nothing to do with? Because he felt that God was at his right hand. If we translate that into more abstract terms, it means this—a realization of true communion and intercourse with God is the real guarantee that the man who has it shall never die, and whosoever can feel 'the Lord is at my right hand' may look forward into all the darkness of death and the grave, and say: 'These have nothing to do with me. They may touch the husk; they may do what they like with the outside shell and wrapping, but I shall not be moved. Even when that which people call "me" is laid in the grave, and sees corruption, Thou wilt show me the path of life.' If here on earth we are able by the effort of faith to set God at our right hand, the movement from earth to a dim beyond shall mean only this, that instead of His standing at our right hand, our Ally and Director, we shall stand at His, and there find how true the Psalmist's confidence was, 'At thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.'

Into the heaven of Thy heart, O God,
I lift up my life, like a flower;
Thy light is deep, and Thy love is broad,
And I am not the child of an hour.

As a little blossom is fed from the whole
Vast depth of unfathomed air,
Through every fibre of thought my soul
Reaches forth, in Thyself to share.

I dare to say unto Thee, my God,
Who hast made me to climb so high,
That I shall not crumble away with the clod:
I am Thine, and I cannot die!

The throb of Thy infinite life I feel
In every beat of my heart;
Upon me hast Thou set eternity's seal;
Forever alive, as Thou art.[1]

[1] Lucy Larcom.

At the Mouth of the Pit.

Ps. xvi. 10.—'Neither wilt thou suffer thine holy one to see corruption' (RVm 'the pit').

THE Revised Version gives us a marginal reading, 'to see the pit.' Here a soul was standing on the threshold of the Unseen. It knew nothing, as we do, of the life and immortality which have been brought to light in the gospel, nothing of Resurrection glory, nothing of the many mansions prepared for those who love God; and yet, as it faced the dark and inscrutable problem of the future life, it was able to look up into the face of God, and say: 'Whatever death may mean, wherever the disembodied spirit may go forth, whatever the solution which will be given to our questions hereafter, this one thing is certain—He will not leave me in Hades, nor suffer His holy one to see the pit.'

But we can sing this song all through life.

1. We can sing it at the pit's mouth of *apparent failure.* Jesus Christ sang it there. Apparently He had failed. What a burst of joy there was on the threshold of His ministry, when He sat upon the Mount of Beatitudes and taught the people, and the crowds thronged around Him at every step! It seemed as though the gathering tumult of love and acclaim would carry Him to His glorious seat upon the throne of David. But the second year He definitely broke with the Pharisees, and from that moment His path became shadowed with infinite sorrow and darkness. In the Garden of Gethsemane He had His life in His hand. Should He keep it, or hand it back to God? He had power to lay it down, and power to take it again; but at any cost He chose to follow His Father's will. Then, as He went down the dark stairway that led into the grave, it seemed as though He were going to absolute and irretrievable failure. It was as though His lifework were marred and spoiled indeed; as though the object for which He came must be unrealized. But as He descended into the grave He must have sung these words to Him-

self as His Psalm of Faith and Hope: 'Thou wilt not leave my soul in Hades; Thou canst not suffer thy beloved one to see corruption.'

2. We can sing it at the pit's mouth of *the renunciation of our dearest hopes and joys.* Abraham sang it there. When he saw the people around him offering their children to false gods, the thought came to him: Can I offer my Isaac? Can I give my child up as they gave theirs? Finally the voice of God seemed to be bidding him do this very thing, and as he climbed Moriah with the eager boy beside him, his heart must have repeated, if not these very words, yet similar ones: 'Thou canst not leave my soul in Hades, nor suffer Thy beloved one to see the pit. There is surely a way out of this into life.'

3. We can sing it at the pit's mouth of *misunderstanding.* Job sang it there. Job was grievously misunderstood and misjudged. Though he was perfect up to his light, and even God acknowledged it, yet people regarded him as the greatest of sinners, and he sat down on his dunghill amid the contumely and reproach of friend and acquaintance; and as he sat there he must have said to himself in effect: 'Thou wilt not leave my soul in Hades, nor suffer Thy holy one to see corruption; I know that my Redeemer liveth, and He will vindicate me.'

4. We can sing it at the pit's mouth of *bereavement.* Mary and Martha must have sung it as they looked along the road for Jesus to come, but saw Him not; and as hour after hour and day after day slowly passed, and still He delayed, they said: 'Can He have forgotten? Did He not love? There is some reason for His delay that we cannot realize; but He cannot leave our souls or Lazarus' in Hades, nor suffer His beloved to see corruption.'

5. We can sing it at the pit's mouth of utter *doubt and depression.* Probably Elijah sang it there. He had fought against the sin of the land. Single-handed He had endeavoured to reverse the flow of events. But he had found Ahab and Jezebel too strong for him, and at last, sinking down exhausted beneath the juniper tree, he asked God to strike him dead. It seemed as though he had lived in vain, since, in spite of all, sin was yet regnant upon the throne, whilst virtue stood upon the scaffold. You can imagine his saying: 'It is impossible that the story of my life should end like this; Thou wilt not leave my soul in Hades, nor suffer Thy holy one to see corruption?'

Are there not those now whose lives have been apparently a failure, who have come down to the very cross of shame, or who have lived to see the result of their laborious efforts numbered by a handful of souls? Are there not many who know what it is to renounce their very Isaac for God's sake—some darling joy, which has been the very life of their heart? Are there not many who are misjudged, misunderstood, and maligned, and whose character is under a passing cloud? Are there not many who have been grappling with evil, and who are staggered and bewildered with its prevalence and virulence? Let such take up this song and dare to say, 'I may go into the pit, and darkness may cover me, but Thou canst not leave my soul in Hades, and Thou wilt not suffer Thy beloved one to see the pit, for there is a way out of it—a path of life upon the other side. I may dip down into the valley, but I shall climb the hill and reach the sunny top, and stand bathed in the joy of Thy face.' [1]

¶ If any man should testify to the power and the goodness of God in his life, I think I am that man. And my testimony to you is this: trust in God. Still trust in God. And though He slays you, still trust in Him. All things are in His hand. All the keys are at His girdle. And we have His oath that all things shall work together for good to them that love Him.[2]

[1] F. B. Meyer.
[2] *The Life of Alexander Whyte, D.D.*, 367.

O Father, I am in the dark,
My soul is heavy-bowed:
I send my prayer up like a lark,
Up through my vapoury shroud,
To find thee,
And remind thee
I am thy child, and thou my father,
Though round me death itself should gather.

Lay thy loved hand upon my head,
Let thy heart beat in mine;
One thought from thee, when all seems dead,
Will make the darkness shine
About me
And throughout me!
And should again the dull night gather,
I'll cry again, *Thou art my father.*[1]

The Path of Life.

Ps. xvi. 11.—'Thou wilt shew me the path of life.'

1. In this passage an Old Testament saint puts into words his hopes and aspirations for the future. It is a passage which is very remarkable; for it seems to express, with considerable emphasis and confidence, a hope which elsewhere in the Old Testament appears generally to be very dim and uncertain, even if it is not lacking altogether. We who are members of the Christian Church are so accustomed to the doctrine of a future resurrection and a blessed life in heaven which is in store for God's children after death, and we regard this belief as made so sure to us by the resurrection of our Saviour, and by His promises to all who are united to Him through faith, that we are apt to overlook the fact that this strong confidence was not and could not be shared in the same way by the saints of the Old Testament, who lived their lives before the coming of Jesus Christ to earth and before His Death and Resurrection. Before our Lord and Saviour had abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, *i.e.*, through His glad tidings of salvation, the doctrine of a future life could not be regarded as a certainty. It was at best a hope, an inspiration, which was doubtless very dear to men's hearts, but which they scarcely ventured to put into words.

So it is that we find that even the best and holiest of men in the Old Testament often appear to be strangely despondent when they allude to the state after death, regarding it as a shadowy kind of existence which can scarcely be called life at all, a state in which the soul will be separated from God, and will be without hope of a brighter dawn.

Thus one Psalmist says:

In death there is no remembrance of thee:
In the grave who shall give thee thanks?
—(Ps. vi. 5).

Whilst another says of himself in his despair that he is—

Cast off among the dead,
Like the slain that lie in the grave,
Whom thou rememberest no more;
And they are cut off from thine hand
—(Ps. lxxxviii. 5).

And later on the same poet asks mournfully:

Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead?
Shall they that are deceased arise and praise thee?
Shall thy loving kindness be declared in the grave?
Or thy faithfulness in Destruction?
Shall thy wonders be known in the dark?
And thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?—(Ps. lxxxviii. 10-12).

So, too, King Hezekiah, when he has been delivered from the fear of impending death, and granted a new lease of life on earth, exclaims, in his poem of thanksgiving:

For the grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee:
They that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth.
The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day.—(Is. xxxviii. 18, 19).

[1] G. Macdonald.

But this gloomy outlook upon the future state after death was not quite universal in Old Testament times. Here and there men seem to have risen to a faith which was able to grasp the conviction of a future blessed life with God. And the way in which they arrived at this conviction appears to have been something like this. They had attained such a real understanding, such a real grasp, of the blessedness and happiness which was theirs through communion with God during their earthly life, that in view of this blessed union with God, and all that it meant for them, they simply overlooked the fact of death. Nothing, they felt, was able to separate them from the love of God. There was the fact of physical death, and they could not explain it away, they could not see *how* death was to be conquered. But still, they belonged to God; and God was to them their all in all. In the future, as in the present, they would still be His, come what may; and that was all their heart's desire.

Notice what a very high degree of faith was involved in all this. For us, who have the privilege of living in the light of our Lord's resurrection, the blessed hope of everlasting life has been made, as it were, so easy to grasp and to make our own. But, supposing that we were in the position of those Old Testament saints, without any direct revelation as to the conquest of death and the promise of a future life with God, we should have to be living very close indeed to God here on earth to be able to rise to a sense of communion so real and definite that in face of it the dark unseen future appeared to be illuminated, and we could feel that neither life nor death, nor things present, nor things to come, were able to separate us from the love of God.

Now listen to what a height of faith one of these Old Testament writers (the author of Ps. lxxiii.) rises, in the blessed sense of the reality of his communion with God. He says to his God:

Nevertheless I am continually with thee;
Thou hast holden my right hand.
According to thy counsel wilt thou lead me,
And afterward receive me gloriously.
Whom have I in heaven?
And, having thee, there is nought that I desire upon earth.
Though my flesh and my heart should have wasted away,
God would be the Rock of my heart and my portion for ever.

Surely faith could scarcely make a higher venture than this, even when guided by the full light of the Christian revelation. 'Though my flesh and my heart should have wasted away'—even, that is, upon the death and dissolution of my earthly frame—'God would be the Rock of my heart and my portion for ever.' What can anyone want to feel, more comforting, more satisfying, than this?

The same train of thought appears to have been working in the mind of this other Psalmist (the writer of Ps. xvi.):

Thou wilt shew me the path of life:
In thy presence is fulness of joy;
In thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.

Here the idea is the same—felt communion with God during this earthly life so real, so satisfying, that it can be described as *the path of life,* and can be thought of as overpassing death, and lasting *for evermore.*

2. This brings us to the way in which our Lord Jesus Christ gathered up and fulfilled in Himself, in a higher and larger sense than they could ever have been realized by those who first gave them voice, the best thoughts and aspirations of the Old Testament. The best of men do not always live at the same level of faith. Faith's range of vision is apt sometimes to be obscured by dark clouds; the human heart is sometimes assailed and cast down by doubting thoughts. And so these Old Testament Psalmists, who were able, as we have seen, to rise upon the wings of faith, and so catch a glimpse of the real meaning of the relationship of the human soul to God, appear sometimes to have been weighed down by doubt and despondency, and to have

missed the sense of the Divine communion and all that it involved for them.

But with our Lord Jesus Christ this was not the case. He, as perfect Man, constantly realized during His sinless earthly life the highest possibilities of communion of a human soul with God the Father, and was therefore able to gather together all the lofty spiritual aspirations which found expression in the Old Testament, and to fulfil them in a far fuller and higher degree than was possible for those who first put them into words. Consequently, the words of Ps. xvi. which we have taken for our text were really fulfilled and given their perfect meaning by our Lord during His earthly life; and when we read them it is just as though we were reading *His* words of faith and trust in God the Father. This, we may take it, is the justification of St. Peter's argument in his sermon on the day of Pentecost, when he finds the true fulfilment of the Psalmist's words in the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts ii. 25ff).

Let us think, then, about the words of our text, as realized by our Lord during His earthly life:

Thou wilt shew me the path of life:
In thy presence is fulness of joy;
In thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.

What did 'the path of life' mean for our Lord, whilst here on earth? We can have no doubt about it. We read the Gospels; and from beginning to end they teach us that Jesus Christ *found the path of life to consist in the doing of the will of God.* Think of His first recorded words when, as a boy of twelve years old, His parents found Him in the Temple-courts: 'Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?' or (as the Greek may be more literally translated) 'occupied in the things of my Father?' (Lk. ii. 49). And, again, our thoughts turn at once to those words of His to His disciples: 'My meat'—*i.e.* that which sustains and nourishes Me—'is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work' (Jn. iv. 34). And again and again we recall expressions which He used, such as 'I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day' (Jn. ix. 4). 'This is the will of him that sent me' (Jn. vi. 39). 'I do always such things as please him' (Jn. viii. 29)—expressions which explain His course of action during His earthly life. In fact (and we may say it with all reverence) the leading idea of our Lord's human life on earth was the doing of the will of God. During His earthly life, from His birth until the last great scene, He realized, to the fullest extent, those words of another Psalmist which are applied to Him in the Epistle to the Hebrews,

Then said I, Lo, I come
To do thy will, O God.
(Ps. xl. 7; Heb. x. 7).

It is in the fact that our Lord found and trod 'the path of life' from the beginning of His life on earth and throughout its course that we find the explanation of His resurrection.

Eternal life (so He constantly tells us) is not something which lies in the future only; it is bound up with, and realized in, the doing of the will of God here on earth, the living in close communion with Him, and growing to know Him more and more fully. 'This is life eternal,' He says of His disciples, 'that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent' (Jn. xvii. 3). And again, 'He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me,' that heareth, *i.e.,* My message of salvation, and believeth, in the sense of putting himself unreservedly into the hands of God for the doing of His will, giving himself to God—he who does this 'hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment but is passed out of death into life' (Jn. v. 24).

Doing the will of God, then, means the present possession of eternal life: it is the treading of 'the path of life' spoken of by the Psalmist, and fulfilled in its highest sense by our Lord.

And *because* our Lord found, in this performance of the Father's will, the true path of life, and eternal life was thus for Him a present possession whilst living here on earth, *therefore* the Resurrection from the dead was the natural sequence; He passed from the grave to the Resurrection of Easter Day because, as St. Peter says in that sermon of his to which I have already alluded, 'it was not possible that he should be holden of death' (Acts ii. 24). That perfect communion with God the Father which He realized during His earthly life was something which death could not destroy. It overpassed death; and, in so doing, broke once and for all the power of death and the grave, of sin and the Devil, and so opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers.

And for us 'the path of life' is to be found through union with our Saviour, and through imitation of Him in doing always the will of God the Father. This is for us the life of communion with God, and is in very deed the beginning of eternal life here below: 'Not my will, but thine be done'; 'Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.'

This path of life will lead through sorrow as well as through joy; it will involve that which is difficult and painful as well as that which is joyous and consoling; but we may have no doubt that it leads at length to that fulness of joy which is in the presence of God, and to those eternal pleasures which are in His right hand.[1]

¶ 'Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.' O chaste and holy love! O sweet and gracious affection! O pure and cleansed purpose, thoroughly washed and purged from any admixture of selfishness, and sweetened by contact with the Divine Will! To reach this state is to become godlike. As a drop of water, poured into wine, loses itself, and takes the colour and savour of wine; or as a bar of iron, heated red-hot, becomes like fire itself, forgetting its own nature; or as the air, radiant with sunbeams, seems not so much to be illuminated as to be light itself; so, in the saints, all human affections melt away, by some unspeakable transmutation, into the will of God. For how could God be all in all, if anything merely human remained in man? The substance will endure, but in another beauty, a higher power, a greater glory. When will that be? Who will see it, who possess it? 'When shall I come to appear before the Presence of God?' 'My heart hath talked of Thee, Seek ye My face: Thy face, Lord, will I seek.' Lord thinkest Thou that I, even I, shall see Thy holy temple?[2]

[1] C. F. Burney, *The Gospel in the Old Testament*, 197ff.

[2] Bernard of Clairvaux.

GUIDANCE.

Ps. xvi. 11.—'Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.'
Ps. xxxii. 8, 9.—'I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.'
Ps. xlviii. 14.—'For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.'
Ps. cvii. 7.—'And he led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation.'
Job xxiii. 10.—'He knoweth the way that I take.'
Is. lviii. 11.—'The Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones; and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.'

Jer. iii. 4.—'Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My father, thou art the guide of my youth?'
Jer. x. 23.—'O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.'
Jer. l. 5.—'They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten.'
Jn. x. 3.—'He calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.'
Heb. xiii. 14.—'For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.'

1. *The meaning of the term.*—The term 'guidance' might be taken in a variety of senses, varying from the promptings of instinct, the indications which Nature gives of her prudence, to the highest moments of illumined insight. Experience in general is a guide, the wise lead the less wise, and the guidance of common-sense is always available. There are also abundant sources to draw upon in the literature of the ages. But it is desirable to employ the term as indicative of experience whose source is in part other than that of the ordinary channels of instinct, investigation, and reasoning. As thus used, the term relates to any item of wisdom, any 'leading' which pertains to the conduct of life, its immediate needs, and ideal interests. The term ordinarily implies belief in the existence of higher powers or presences, and the capacity of man to obtain wisdom for special occasions, either through the exercise of unwonted receptivity or through the spontaneous leadings of the inner life.

2. *The fact of Divine guidance.*—The belief in a Divine guidance is the common property of all the great religions. It is formulated in their dogmas; it is embodied in their traditions; above all, it finds frequent and beautiful expression in their prayers. Listen, for example, to the words of the Stoic Cleanthes, in the third century before Christ—'Lead thou me on, O Zeus, and thou, O Destiny, whithersoever ye have appointed me to go!' Or read the opening prayer of the Koran—'Direct us in the right way, the way of those to whom Thou hast been gracious!' Or think of such Christian hymns as William Williams' 'Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,' or James Edmeston's 'Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us, or—most familiar of all—John Henry Newman's 'Lead, kindly Light.' All voice that passionate longing for Divine direction which is one of the most universal and characterstic features of our religious experience. And what the religions of all ages have sought for, the religions of all ages have found.

Whither, midst falling dew,
While glow the heavens with the last steps of day,
Far through their rosy depths dost thou pursue
Thy solitary way?

There is a Power whose care
Teaches thy way along that pathless coast,
The desert and illimitable air,
Lone wandering, but not lost.

He who, from zone to zone,
Guides through the boundless sky thy certain flight,
In the long way that I must tread alone,
Will lead my steps aright.[1]

3. *The need of guidance.*—Nobody thinks of climbing the dangerous passes and peaks of Switzerland without a guide. Experienced travellers are very careful about getting experienced guides. Even then a man sometimes loses his life. These guides have to learn the way at the risk of their own lives, and they take serious risks every time they climb. And this is a sphere where a man can see and feel with his outer material senses.

How much more does a man need a guide for the climb on into the future days, where no man has yet learned how to see or feel an inch ahead. With all our great advances in knowledge and science, we do not know surely a clock's tick ahead what is coming. The coming year, and month, and day—even the

[1] William Cullen Byrant.

next moment—is utterly hidden from our eyes. We are in Egyptian darkness that may be felt, and that is felt, about to-morrow. We are used to it from birth, and move on with a certain steadiness, planning and shrewdly guessing how certain matters will go.

That very steadiness of step in our common life, on into the unlit darkness of the next hour, tells of a great Guide whose hand upon life all men have learned unconsciously to trust. But the factor of fear is never absent from human life, though it lessens steadily as one comes to know the Guide.

¶ In any great and unexpected crisis, in any mind-confusing perplexity, I do feel the need of God, but not in the small and trivial things of daily routine. I rise from sleep strong and buoyant, to take up my accustomed work, and go forth singing to my familiar tasks in the business or in the home; but how seldom do I begin the day by saying to God, 'I know that I may easily fall into mistakes and sin to-day; hold Thou me up!'

And yet, how often has a long train of events, colouring the whole life to its latest hour, been set in motion by some trivial, unforeseen, unexpected, accidental occurrence on a day that seemed just like any other day, having no special significance attaching to it or danger lurking in it! A few words spoken, a hasty bargain made, a casual introduction on the street, a slight accident, the missing of a train or an appointment, the going or not going to a certain house, the answering or not answering a letter, the acceptance or non-acceptance of some business or social or domestic proposal—small things like these have often changed the whole complexion of a life, and made the memory of the day on which they happened either a life-long joy or a life-long regret.[1]

¶ In one issue of the *Record of Congress,* it was related how, in the embarrassment of an early session, of which the worthy chaplain had not been advised, the Speaker called the House to order with this amazing announcement: 'The clerk will please read the journal. We will proceed without Divine guidance.' No protest was offered, no word was uttered, and all seemed willing to proceed without that guiding wisdom which cometh down from above.[1]

I thought I could weave my life aright
  Without a hand to guide me;
So I took the threads, both dark and light,
Not pausing to glance at the pattern bright
  The Master had laid beside me.

With pitying love He saw begin
  The web of my poor endeavour;
Plans, hopes, and fears were woven in—
On self relying, success to win,
  I might thus toil on for ever.

Then I feared what the Master dear would say;
  But His voice came gently chiding—
'My child, these fragments cast all away,
With humble mind start afresh to-day,
  Look to Me alone for guiding.'

With the Master's hand to set us right,
  And His holy life before us,
Why should we trust to our own poor might?
Our utmost effort is all too slight,
  And a great Love watcheth o'er us.[2]

4. *The promise of guidance.*—Where shall we find it? Naturally the child of God, longing to know his Father's will, turns to the sacred Book, and refreshes his confidence by noticing how in all ages God has guided those who dared to trust Him up to the very hilt, but who, at the time, must have been as perplexed as we often are now. We know how Abraham left kindred and country, and started, with no other guide than God, across the trackless desert to a land which he knew not. We know how for forty years the Israelites were led through the peninsula of Sinai, with its labyrinths of red sandstone, and its wastes of sand. We know how Joshua, in

[1] G. H. Knight, *Abiding Help for Changing Days*, 28.

[1] J. F. Newton, *The Sword of the Spirit*, 74.
[2] Una, *In Life's Garden*, 79.

entering the Land of Promise, was able to cope with the difficulties of an unknown region and to overcome great and warlike nations, because he looked to the Captain of the Lord's Host, who ever leads to victory. We know how, in the early Church, the Apostles were enabled to deal with the most difficult questions, and to solve the most perplexing problems, laying down principles which guide the Church to the end of time; and this because it was revealed to them by the Holy Spirit what they should do and say.

The promises for guidance are unmistakable. Take a few of them.

Ps. xxxii. 8: 'I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou wilt go.'—This is God's distinct assurance to those whose transgressions are forgiven, and whose sins are covered, and who are more quick to notice the least symptom of His will than horse or mule to feel the bit.

Pr. iii. 6.—'In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct (or make plain) thy paths.'—A sure word, on which we may rest; if only we fulfil the previous conditions of trusting with all our heart, and of not leaning on our own understanding.

Is. lviii. 11.—'The Lord shall guide thee continually.'—It is impossible to think that He could guide us at all, if He did not guide us always. For the greatest events of life, like the huge rocking-stones in the West of England, revolve on the smallest points. A pebble may alter the flow of a stream. The growth of a grain of mustard seed may determine the rainfall of a continent. Thus we are bidden to look for a guidance which shall embrace the whole of life in all its myriad necessities.

Jn. viii. 12.—'I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.'—The reference here seems to be to the wilderness wanderings; and the Master promises to be to all faithful souls, in their pilgrimage to the City of God, all that the cloudy pillar was to the children of Israel on their march to the Land of Promise.

Take one passage more—Ps. xlviii. 14: 'For this is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.'—It is a fair and literal offer, and means just what it says, which is that we can habitually have at command the omniscient wisdom of God, if we want it; that no hard question or serious crisis will come to us that God will not give us His wisdom to determine in the best way; that no decision will be forced upon us in which we need make a mistake, if we will accept the solution which God shall offer us. God offers Himself as our Counsellor: He will guide us by His counsel. And that not in great matters only. God does not offer Himself to us for great emergencies only. The steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord. God offers us His wisdom for details no less than for crises, and that is important because the most of our life consists of small details, and our life in bulk will be shaped by the adjustment of these details.

But this is not all. One is constantly surprised by the correspondence between the words of the Psalms and the words of Christ. More and more it seems that the Psalms are full of Christ. And surely we cannot miss the correspondence here: 'This God is our God forever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death': 'Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.' The end of the world: death. Ah! that is what troubles many of us most, after all. And yet why do we put the emphasis there on the end, as if that were the hardest thing; as if we needed guidance and counsel and help there more than anywhere? It does seem that if we ever come to see this thing from the right point, we shall find ourselves more concerned about living than about dying. The great thing is the journey, not the end; because, of course, if the road is the right one, the end will be right. We want the guide *at* the end, but in order to that we want Him all the way *to* the end. That is what He says we shall have. 'He will be our guide even unto death.' Beyond death we shall have Him if we have Him up to that point, for the great object of His guidance is to bring us to His own home.

¶ I remember a glorious morning in the tropical sea. The ocean was one expanse of emerald and amethyst, flecked with the painted nautilus-sails, and shot through with silver flashes of flying-fish. Looking down, the purple shoals were visible through the shallow water. Around lay savage ledges of rock, and through all the ship held on her course, until a lonely lighthouse on a barren island was passed, and then the colour of the sea changed, as the shoals and ledges fell off into the fathomless abyss. Yet the transition was not sharp nor violent, but most beautiful. The ocean was still beneath us, though deeper. No tremor or shock marked the passage into deep, dark blue; and so it seems to me it might be as we pass on under God's pilotage over the shoals of life, amid all its beauty and colour, amid the ledges where so many have been wrecked, and onward to where the last point is passed and life falls away into immortality. We need not fear as the water deepens. The same hand is on the wheel. It is life still into which we are moving, but with a fuller swell, a larger sweep, a deeper depth of joy and rest. God will take us. If we would but learn to translate that hard word 'death' into God's taking us.[1]

5. *The experience of guidance.*—Every faithful soul is supernaturally piloted, and to every such soul it might be said, 'Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee.' If we look back on our own lives, we shall doubtless recognize this truth. As we gaze once more upon the half-forgotten scenes, and review the events and incidents of our past career, there is borne in on us a conviction that things have been most wonderfully and providentially arranged for us. We did not realize it at the time. We had no notion then that everything was being arranged for us. We had not the slightest suspicion that we were being Divinely led. On the contrary, we fancied that we were managing everything ourselves. We thought of ourselves as forging ahead by the power of our own will, along lines of our own choosing; whereas it is evident now that our will and our choice had comparatively little to do with the matter. We see quite plainly now that Someone else mapped out our journey, and conducted us on it, and intervened continually to keep us to the appointed path.

[1] M. R. Vincent, *The Covenant of Peace*, 139.

I.

OUR GUIDE.

Whatever may be the method or medium of guidance, all Christian people look to God as their Guide, whether as God the Father, the living Christ, or the Holy Spirit.

i. God.

The idea of guidance is often attached to God in Scripture. It was symbolized in the pillar of cloud and of fire in which God manifested Himself as the leader of the host of Israel. When the angel of Jehovah appeared to Joshua, he said, 'As captain of the Lord's host am I come.' Moses said to the children of Israel, 'The Lord will go over Jordan before thee.' And in his review of the people's history, he said, 'He found him in a desert land, and in a waste howling wilderness. He led him about.' David says, 'He leadeth me into green pastures'; Isaiah, 'The Lord shall guide thee continually.'

¶ Many of you are familiar with Kaulbach's great fresco of the destruction of Jerusalem. You remember the awful confusion that rages round the temple porch, the laying waste of the holiest shrine, the horrors of carnage which gather round the altar where the high-priest stabs himself in despair. And you remember, too, that lovely group in one corner of the picture, a Christian family making its way out of the doomed city under the conduct of an angel, a mother with her little ones mounted upon an ass, the father by their side, and every feature and attitude of the group pervaded with a heavenly calm. The very beast, as he moves leisurely on, plucks at the green boughs in his path. God is their guide for ever. The attending angel holds high in his hand

the cup of covenant, and we might almost fancy them singing, 'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble; therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.'[1]

At cool of day, with God I walk
My garden's grateful shade;
I hear His voice among the trees,
And I am not afraid.

I see His presence in the night—
And, though my heart is awed,
I do not quail beneath the sight
Or nearness of my God.

He speaks to me in every wind,
He smiles from every star;
He is not deaf to me, nor blind,
Nor absent, nor afar.

His hand, that shuts the flowers to sleep,
Each in its dewy fold,
Is strong my feeble life to keep,
And competent to hold.

I cannot walk in darkness long—
My light is by my side;
I cannot stumble or go wrong,
While following such a guide.

He is my stay and my defence;—
How shall I fail or fall?
My helper is Omnipotence!
My ruler ruleth all.

The powers below and powers above
Are subject to His care:—
I cannot wander from His love
Who loves me everywhere.

Thus dowered, and guarded thus, with Him
I walk this peaceful shade;
I hear His voice among the trees,
And I am not afraid![2]

[1] M. R. Vincent, *The Covenant of Peace*, 141.
[2] C. A. Mason.

ii. The Living Christ.

1. Christ Jesus is our Guide, first, by giving us *the personal example of His own life.* He comes into this world and Himself treads the path of human life; then turning to us, He says to us one by one, 'Follow Me.' Christian life is the imitation of Christ. Do we ask what this imitation means? To imitate Christ is to follow Him, to copy Him even to the point of mimicry, for that is the force of the word used by St. Paul in the First Epistle to the Corinthians. 'Be ye mimickers of me even as I mimic Christ.' We have to go forth into the world with our eyes fixed upon Jesus, knowing that in every stage of life He has gone before us, that in every sphere of life He has been our Forerunner, that in every variation of character or circumstance we can turn to Him as our Model. The life of Jesus is not a portent to be wondered at, but an example to be followed.

We are to follow Him in every stage of life, for in each stage His Footsteps are left for us to tread in. He was the Babe of Bethlehem, the Child and the young Man at Nazareth, the devoted Worker of Capernaum. Everywhere He has gone before us, and if we cannot see His footsteps in *our* sphere, we had better leave it. In the cottage home, in the carpenter's shop, in the synagogue, among the throng of men, in the banqueting hall, in the home of woe, in His communings with Nature, in His sharing of our very sleep—everywhere Christ has left the marks of His footsteps. This is what Jesus has done for us. He has not revealed any new way or any startling change in our existence; He has consecrated for us ordinary spheres and experiences of life —home-life, service, devotion, rest, recreation; and always from early morn until we lie down at night—yes, even in the resting hours of sleep—we can place our feet in the very footprints of our Guide.

2. He is, however, most of all our Guide in *His heavenly life.* In His assumed humanity He has passed from this world into heaven, and is seated on the throne of the Majesty

on High. Yet, seated there, He is still in intimate union with His people on earth. Nay, more than this, the very condition of His passing into that intimate union was His personal withdrawal from earth to heaven; for now He is near to His people with the nearness of spiritual union created, sustained and strengthened by the ministry of His indwelling Spirit. Thus united to them and dwelling in them, He guides them step by step.

He is our Guide because He knows us.

(1) He who would direct me aright must know clearly what it is that God wills me to be, he must have a clear apprehension of the end of my life. All life rightly lived is a reaching forward to a predestined end, and therefore he who would lead me in the right path must have a perfect knowledge of God's eternal purpose for me. And this knowledge Jesus alone possesses. He, the Eternal Son of the Eternal Father, has shared in the counsels of the Divine Father, He has shared in the Father's thought for me. Therefore He, and He alone, can direct me, for He alone knows perfectly what God wills me to be.

(2) In the next place, He who would direct me aright must not only know the end for which I was created, he must know the nature of the one he guides. Unless he knows my inner being, how can he direct me? God's thought for each of us is an individual thought. Individuality is stamped upon every creation of God, and pre-eminently it is stamped on man. All our life, then, in time, and, most probably, in the hereafter, is a period of education; we are being shaped here to take our destined position in eternity, to give expression there to God's eternal thought for us. It is essential, therefore, that he who would direct me aright should understand what are the features of character that must be brought out if I am to become what God would have me to be; he must know me thoroughly who is to be my true director in life.

(3) And, further, he who would direct me aright must have a continuous knowledge of the external circumstances of my life; he must know where I am day by day and moment by moment; he must know what influences are being brought to bear upon me in the environments of my life; he must be able to teach me, being what I am, so to adapt myself to those environments as to become what God would have me be. There must be this threefold knowledge in every true director; and since this exists only in One, He alone can be the true guide of the people of God.

¶ A guide is all very well if he knows the way, but if he does not, he is the most fatal piece of luggage in the world.[1]

Government divine
O'er all this reek of blunders and of woes
Keeps an unravaged shrine
Not here, not there, but in the souls of those
Who neither weep nor whine,
But trust the guidance of the One Who Knows.[2]

iii. The Holy Spirit.

1. The Holy Spirit is the agent who carries on the prophetic work of Jesus Christ, representing the visible presence of the Redeemer since His ascension and glorification. As Christ is Paraclete in heaven, so the Holy Spirit is Paraclete on earth. They are one; the self reigning from heaven is the glorified Christ, the other self teaching and ruling on earth is the Holy Spirit. He represents the Christ and makes real and effective to the believer what Christ the ruler of human history and destiny is—our 'wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.'

2. It is in the presence and leading of this Holy Spirit that we can have the guidance that we need in our entire life and work in relation to God. It will be said that men, believing that they were following the Spirit's guidance, have often erred, even grievously, as the Anabaptists of Münster, the Brethren

[1] *The Life of Sir James Fitzjames Stephen*, by his brother, 370.

[2] Ada Cambridge, *The Hand in the Dark, and other Poems*, 23.

of the Free Spirit in Germany, and other more modern examples; that to surrender ourselves to the Spirit's guidance is to leave ourselves open to all manner of delusion. Ignoring or forgetting the nature of the Holy Spirit, men have indeed often erred. But no one has ever fallen into error who has sought sincerely to be led by the Spirit *as the nature of the Spirit has been made known in Christ,* or as it proceeded in its truth and power from Him. This alone is the Christian Guide, and Christianity is not responsible for what men following some other spirit have said or done. Where the Church and individual Christians have erred has been in *not* following the leading of that Spirit. Every kind of error in doctrine and practice can be traced back to that. What is needed to-day, and all that is needed, for the guidance of the Church in general, and of each individual in particular, is to bring everything into harmony with the holy Spirit of God and of Christ.

¶ The child of God is not only beset by difficulties, but is often in the midst of dangerous delusions. The truth is presented to him, or rather what he believes to be true; error is put before him under the guise of the most precious truth; Satan transforms himself into an angel of light, and therefore the child of God needs a guide who not only can see through the deceptions, but can unmask every delusion. He needs at such times a guide who has something more than the highest human wisdom, a guide who is Omnipotent, Omniscient, Infallible, All-Sufficient, and Divine. Such is the Holy Ghost, and God has sent His Holy Spirit to fulfil this very office. He comes with Divine authority; He Himself is Divine, all the attributes of Deity belong to Him equally with the Father and the Son.[1]

II.

The Manner of Our Guidance.

1. Sometimes God seems to guide us immediately and directly. We have inspirations, revelations. We seem to hear a still, small voice which cries, 'This is the way, walk ye in it.' Mysterious communications come to us. 'God has a few of us whom He whispers in the ear,' says Robert Browning. 'I hear Thy whisper in my heart,' Charles Wesley sings. 'Blessed are the ears,' cries Thomas à Kempis, 'that gladly receive the pulses of the Divine whispers.'

¶ It was such a whisper—was it not?—that came to Donald Hankey in the Island of Mauritius, at a time when he was in doubt about the course that he ought to pursue. 'One day,' he writes, 'this sentence flashed across my mind, "If you would know Christ, behold He is at work in His vineyard." I took the vineyard to mean poorer England, and at the earliest opportunity I resigned my commission with a view to becoming a slum parson.'[1]

¶ A very definite lesson was taught us by Lord Radstock's referring everything to God and being literally guided by His Spirit in every detail.

One morning I specially remember his having made an appointment to meet our Vicar at the noon prayer meeting, and return to my house to lunch. Time passed, and as was his wont he sat on the corner of the table talking and dictating his letters until I reminded him that the hour for the meeting was passing. His reply was that the Lord would not let him go yet, and when asked whether that meant that he had been mistaken in appointing the meeting, he said, No, it was all right, but he could not go yet. He said he did not know why the Lord kept him waiting. Shortly after, a telegram quite unexpectedly was handed to him, and his exclamation, 'Praise the Lord, this is what He kept me waiting for,' and his thankfulness that he had not missed an important message and yet was able to reach the meeting in time to fulfil his part, made one realise how literally 'the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delighteth in his way.'[2]

[1] E. H. Hopkins, *Talks with Beginners in the Divine Life,* 79.

[1] F. H. Dudden, *The Delayed Victory,* 106.
[2] Mrs. E. Trotter, *Lord Radstock,* 145.

(1) Direct guidance is believed by many to be given them in answer to prayer. Take two examples. Here is what Edward Gosse says:

My parents founded every action, every attitude, upon their interpretation of the Scriptures, and upon the guidance of the Divine Will as revealed to them by direct answer to prayer. Their ejaculation in the face of any dilemma was, 'Let us cast it before the Lord!' So confident were they of the reality of their intercourse with God, that they asked for no other guide. They recognized no spiritual authority among men, they subjected themselves to no priest or minister, they troubled their consciences about no current manifestation of 'religious opinion.' They lived in an intellectual cell, bounded at its sides by the walls of their own house, but open above to the very heart of the uttermost heavens.[1]

Turn again to Lord Radstock. His biographer writes:

From the first Lord Radstock sought to work with the sanction and under the guidance of the clergy, though their opposition afterwards forced him to adopt an independent position. There is a touching record in his own words of how much this independence cost him, and how earnestly he sought a sign from the Lord as to whether he should continue to give witness for his Master, or accept with submission the hindrances put in his way. Deeply exercised in soul, he resorted to prayer and entreated God for some token, asking that within the following twenty-four hours three evidences of blessing from the open-air services he was then holding on the beach at Ventnor might be given him, to prove that his work was in accordance with the Divine Will. The next morning came letters from three different people who said they had got light at these services. The letters were, of course, written in ignorance of his prayer, and he accepted them as an indication that he was in the path of God's Will.[2]

[1] E. Gosse, *Father and Son*, 14.
[2] Mrs. E. Trotter, *Lord Radstock*, 129.

(2) While prayer is in addition an act of worship, it is essentially a request for the guidance of the Spirit, and the interpretation put upon prayer is likely to be the same as that put upon guidance. If one still believes that God answers prayer by altering the course of events, one will seek guidances which imply interruptions of law. But if one adores the God of law, one's prayer will be for the guidance which is already provided in the plenitude of the Divine love. Some maintain that prayer is meaningless unless it implies belief that God will bring about some change in the course of things. But others would ask, Why restrict the meaning of prayer thus narrowly? Despite the fact that prayer has a crude beginning in which it is allied with incantation and with selfish interest, it has a place and meaning even in the most intelligent spiritual life. Prayer springs from a need and the belief that there is a provision for that need. Our needs change all along the line, the theory of the Godhead changes; yet prayer endures. The type of prayer indicates the stage of development. To condemn its form as 'vain repetition' is not to disparage the principle; its persistence in human life may be taken as evidence of man's belief in guidance. The complete theory of guidance begins with an evaluation of prayer and ends with the conclusion that adjustment to the perennial gifts of the Spirit is its permanent value. Prayer lifts consciousness from ordinary levels to the plane of sweet communion with the Father. It assumes definite form as the need of the moment prompts. But, however earnest the prayer, however great the need, the true request for guidance ends with the qualification, in which belief in prayer and theory of guidance are alike summarized, 'Nevertheless, if it be thy will.'

¶ We do not say, Guide us as the sun and stars are guided, or, Guide us according to our own wishes: or even merely, Guide us against our own wishes: but, Guide first our wishes, for then our whole selves will follow. Take the rule and government over our wills, fashion and direct *them*, mould them according to Thine, so that the things which please

Thee may please us, that Thy will may be done on earth as quietly, obediently, and joyfully as in heaven.[1]

2. The direct inward guidance of God seems to many so difficult to obtain and so uncertain that they crave an external and infallible guide.

(1) Such a guide, infallible, authoritative, impossible to mistake, has been found by some in the voice of *the Church*. The desire for such guidance is, in truth, entirely natural to everyone who feels the difficulties of life, whether of belief or of conduct. We know our weakness, we distrust our own judgment, and we embrace with eagerness any theory of life which will permit us to transfer the responsibilities of decision from ourselves. The most powerful force which draws men and women into the bosom of the great Latin Church is the promise which she unfalteringly offers of such infallible direction. And yet, we ask ourselves, What guidance can she possibly promise which would not have been offered, if it were indeed so best for men, by Him whom she worships as Master and Lord? 'It is expedient for you that I go away.' The unmistakable Voice of the Lord is a lesser gift than the secret striving of His Spirit. Must not that be still more true of the Voice of the Church?

The infallibility we deny to Rome is equally impossible for other churches. If the consensus of the Middle Ages cannot absolve us from the duty of examining and restating truth for ourselves, we may be quite sure that we cannot transfer this privilege to the wisdom of later generations, even though our authorities now include the most enlightened and spiritual forces in Christendom. The Thirty-nine Articles, the Westminster Confession, or Wesley's Notes and Fifty-three Sermons, for all the excellence that may be claimed for them as doctrinal statements, can impose no authoritative obligation upon a Protestant conscience. Doctrinal standards are essentially conveniences for classification. They express in general terms the lines which we recognize as summarizing our own thought, and we give them a voluntary assent. They can never be for us a substitute for independent thinking.

¶ The advantage a man like Lord Elgin had enjoyed in meeting all sorts of persons was very apparent in his varied talk. His observation was keen, and I was particularly struck with the way in which he noted the difference in a friend who had joined the Church of Rome. 'In his youth, he was delightfully tender in conscience, and I often admired his evident desire to rule his life, but I was surprised to find, when we met many years afterwards, that he looked on dinner as the great event of the day, talked a great deal too much about vintages, and snuffed immoderately. We came to close quarters, and he told me he lived under direction, had his life mapped out for him, and had very little trouble. I marvelled at the change, and was not edified.'[1]

(2) *Holy Scripture* is, we thankfully confess, 'a lamp to our feet, and a light to our path.' Do we, then, demand that its light shall so illumine all the dark territory through which we journey, that no shadows shall perplex, no snares shall embarrass the traveller? It has, indeed, proved itself to be an unfailing help; its light is never quenched; we should be mad to shut our eyes to it. But does it, then, so direct us that intelligent prudence is unneeded? Is it wise to dispense with every other light—the light of reason, which is 'the candle of the Lord' within us, the light of science, which comes from the Lord of light? Is the light of Scripture always so brilliant that the way is made plain before our face? We know the answer. The guidance of the Bible alone, if we could be sure that we should always interpret it aright, would indeed be sufficient for us. But men who sincerely believed themselves to follow it have been led into many strange and divergent paths.

¶ If the Bible *is* infallible, who is the unerring interpreter of it? There are many organized churches; which *one* is infallible

[1] F. J. A. Hort, *Village Sermons*, ii. 137.

[1] *The Recollections of the Very Rev. G. D. Boyle*, 219.

and how do we know that its conclusions are invariably right? If the Spirit of God is the true Guide, through whom does He manifest Himself infallibly? Isaac Penington says (*Works*, vol. I, p. 67): 'The Light of God's Spirit is a certain and infallible rule, and the eye that sees it is a certain eye.' That would make any individual who had a 'revelation' infallible and certain.[1]

(3) There are not a few people who would put up another claimant to infallibility. The Pope has gone, and the Book, and now *Science* reigns in their stead. This kind of assumption lies at the root of the prevalent denials of miracle. 'Miracles do not happen,' said Matthew Arnold; and no Pope ever spoke *ex cathedra* with a more infallible air. Well, we shall see. There are not wanting signs, for those who have courage and insight, that some of the flat denials of yesterday may become cautious admissions of to-morrow, and perhaps even confident dogmas in some near future: what the as yet unexplored spiritual forces of the world may be able to do, even with the material universe in which they are placed, we may come to understand far more than we do just now. But if fervent dogmatists who profess to speak for Science claim for her the infallibility they deny to other voices, it will be well to recall the rapidity with which great scientific theories change and pass. They give immense impetus to the advance of knowledge, and in many things permanently enlarge our outlook, but they develop into new forms with new discovery, and their assertions may in a generation cease to disturb theologians who found them hard to fit into an ordered system of thought. It is in the essence of Science to be eternally forgetting the things that are behind and reaching forward to the things that are before; and no truly scientific spirit would ever claim infallibility for our knowledge in any sphere that can possibly touch our inquiries into the great mysteries of God and His relation with the world. 'Exact sciences' there are, whose results must be taken as permanent and assured in every way. But these are just the sciences that never can come into real contact with the problems of religion. In the rest of the sciences, just as in conduct and in religious theory, probability and not infallibility rules with indisputable sway.

3. We find God guiding us in the experiences of life.

(1) These experiences sometimes seem quite trivial. Take up almost any biography, and you will see how curiously men's careers have been fashioned and determined by what seem to be the veriest accidents. A man walks down one side of the street instead of the other, and happens to meet a friend, and in consequence of that meeting his entire after-life is altered. A man comes across a book, or listens to a lecture or sermon, or is struck by a phrase let fall in a casual conversation, or is impressed by a sentence in a letter, and thereafter his ideas are changed and his whole character is given a fresh bias and direction. One could name a score of famous men whose life-history was decided by some such apparently trivial circumstance. A verse of the Gospel heard in church determined the future of St. Antony; a game of play that of St. Athanasius; a child's cry that of St. Ambrose. The life of St. Dominic hinges on a casual embassy, that of St. Francis on an illness, that of Luther on a thunder-storm, that of Ignatius Loyola on a broken leg, that of Pascal on a carriage-accident, that of Wesley on a visit paid 'very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans.' And such stories are very common. Dr. Johnson, indeed, goes so far as to maintain that 'whoever shall review his life will find that the whole tenor of his conduct has been determined by some accident of no apparent moment.' Yes, but how are we to interpret such singular 'accidents' as these? The world may call them chances. But are they not rather Providences—Povidences which show us that God is nearer than we suppose, and more concerned with us than we imagine—Providences which show us that

[1] R. M. Jones, *Social Law in the Spiritual World*, 179.

God uses all manner of means, when He sees us missing our vocation and wandering from the track, to turn us back to the right way, and inspire us once more 'both to will and to do of his good pleasure'?

(2) Again, it is to some friend of longer experience or better judgment that we owe our guidance. 'The middle-aged,' says George Eliot,[1] 'who have lived through their strongest emotions, but are yet in the time when memory is still half passionate and not merely contemplative, should surely be a sort of natural priesthood, whom life has disciplined and consecrated to be the refuge and rescue of early stumblers and victims of self-despair. Most of us, at some moment in our young lives, would have welcomed a priest of that natural order in any sort of canonicals or uncanonicals, but had to scramble upwards into all the difficulties of nineteen entirely without such aid.'

Such a guide Octavia Hill found in F. D. Maurice. She writes: 'I am often tempted to trust too much to you; not, I think, to believe your wisdom, and gentleness, and patience, and faith to be greater than they are, but to think too much that I was to trust to them in you, instead of in God, because I have not felt Him to be an ever-present guide, not only into the mysteries of His own Love, not only into the meaning of past wants, but into the grounds of all right and all wise action. This and this only has confused me; all has been ordered to teach me, all to strengthen me; and I alone am wrong. Only with these thoughts others mingle; I must not, in order to recover faith in a Director, give up the direction He places in my way; I must not mistake self-will for conscience nor impatience for honesty. No one on earth can distinguish them for me; but He will. It so often seems to me as if two different courses of action were right or might be right; and this is what puzzles me, even tho' it is a blessing as binding me to people of widely different opinions. Thank you once more, dear Sir, for all teaching, given now and before.'[2]

[1] *The Mill on the Floss.*
[2] *Life of Octavia Hill*, 155.

III.

The Acceptance of God's Guidance.

1. The first necessity is *the single eye.* Is the mind cleared of prejudice and self-will? Is the motive pure? So long as there is some thought of personal advantage, some idea of acquiring the praise and commendation of men, some aim at self-aggrandisement, it will be simply impossible to find out God's purpose concerning us. The door must be resolutely shut against all this, if we would hear the still small voice. All cross-lights must be excluded if we would see the Urim and Thummim stone brighten with God's 'Yes,' or darken with His 'No.'

¶ I need not envy the men of old who could get intimations of the heavenly will through the Urim and Thummim on the breastplate of their High Priest—that sparkling row of gems that were either irradiated with mystic light or left clouded and dark. I have only to keep an eye on God in simple, single-hearted faith, and His loving glance will meet me, shining in approval or clouded in warning, but always 'leading me in the way that I should go.' I have only to keep my conscience, heart, and will sensitive to the impression of that eye, as the photographic plate is sensitive to the light that falls upon it—I have only to free my heart from the bias of personal desires, and from all subservience to the judgments of men, and keep looking up, in child-like appeal, to the Wise Love that never mistakes; and then I will be sure to see the eye of God raying out its guiding light, and be able to hear in it a voice which says, 'This is the way, walk thou in it, and thou shalt find rest to thy soul.'[1]

2. Next, *prompt obedience.* Most emphatic is the account of the way in which the Israelites obeyed the leading of the pillar as they journeyed through the wilderness. The writer does not seem to be able to get away from the thought that whatever the pillar did, that

[1] G. H. Knight, *Abiding Help for Changing Days*, 31.

moment prompt obedience followed. He says it over and over again. 'As long as the cloud abode they rested, and when the cloud tarried long they journeyed not'; 'when the cloud was a few days on the tabernacle they abode'; 'according to the commandment they journeyed'; 'when the cloud abode until the morning they journeyed'; 'whether it were two days, or a month, or a year that the cloud tarried they journeyed not, but abode in their tents.' And, after he has reiterated it half-a-dozen times or more, he finishes by putting it all again in one verse, as the last impression which he would leave from the whole narrative—'at the commandment of the Lord they rested in their tents, and at the commandment of the Lord they journeyed.' Obedience was prompt; whensoever and for whatsoever the signal was given, the men were ready. That is what we have to set before us as the type of our lives—that we shall be as ready for every indication of God's will as the Israelites were. The peace and blessedness of our lives largely depend on our being eager to obey.

¶ 'I sticks my hands in my pockets,' says the dissenting preacher in one of Q's stories, 'an' waits on the Lord; an' what He tells me to do, I do.' And an instance is given when the preacher suddenly appears to help the vicar and his son, who are repairing the church. 'T'other night,' he explains, 'the Lord said to me, "Arise, go, and show them chaps how to do it." "Dear Lord," I said, "Thou knowest I be a Bryanite." The Lord said to me, "None of your back answers! Go and do as I tell 'ee." So here I be.'[1]

3. If the way is not clear, one thing remains —*quiet waiting*. To attain it we must put ourselves into an attitude of passive receptivity with regard to God. If we thus place ourselves in connexion with the centre of all life, we shall at any rate see things in a truer perspective than when we are engrossed in the schemes of our own strutting intellect. We shall understand the inner affinities, the spiritual values, the aim and significance of the processes that are at work. We shall see deeper into the meaning of life, as the artist sees deeper than the ordinary man into the drift and coherence of a sunrise or a storm. 'The mind that watches and receives' at God's feet will be best able to enter into God's purposes, and to react readily and promptly to each new indication of His will; it will neither be shackled by habit nor blinded by conceit, but, rooted and grounded in God, will meet each new occasion with the response which is in accordance with that will of God which it is getting to understand.

¶ Dr. Jowett says that he was once in the most pitiful perplexity, and consulted Dr. Berry, of Wolverhampton. 'What would you do if you were in my place?' he entreated. 'I don't know, Jowett, I am not there, and you are not there yet! When have you to act?' On Friday,' Dr. Jowett replied, 'Then,' answered Berry, 'you will find your way perfectly clear on Friday! The Lord will not fail you!' And, sure enough, on Friday all was plain.[1]

¶ The Rev. Duncan Macgregor, Dundee, came one day to consult him about the state of his own mind, which had got into what he thought great confusion about some things. Having heard what he had to say, Dr. Duncan replied, 'Take care you don't run too fast for the Holy Ghost; for you know it is "As many as are *led* by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." '[2]

[1] A. Chandler, *The Cult of the Passing Moment*, ii. 77.

In the Night.

Ps. xvii. 3.—'Thou hast visited me in the night.'

If we look on this world as the dwelling-place of man—the one being on its surface who has conscious relations with its Maker—it is evident that night, whatever be the independent physical or astronomical account of it, must have another and a higher meaning; and

[1] F. W. Boreham, *Mountains in the Mist*, 53.
[2] J. Duncan, *The Pulpit and Communion Table*, 36.

this, its higher meaning and purpose, is hinted at in the exclamation of the Psalmist—'Thou hast visited me in the night.'

1. Night, viewed in its relations to the life of man, strikes us, first of all, and pre-eminently, as *an interruption*. It breaks in upon and suspends human occupation of whatever kind; it writes on the face of the heavens the veto of God on uninterrupted work. By it the Great Ruler of the Universe interferes periodically, that His creatures may economize the limited supply of strength with which He has endowed them. At the very least, eight hours in the twenty-four—a quarter of a century in the life of man of seventy-five—are rescued by night from the grasping demands of competitive labour. As each day the shadow of night creeps round the surface of the world, advances from village to village, from city to city, from country to country, from continent to continent, from east to west, millions of human workers hail the approaching pause in toil which is thus mercifully imposed upon them. It is man's prerogative and rule, when his life has not been distorted by artificial civilization, that he 'goeth forth to his work and to his labour until the evening.' We take the familiar features of our life so much for granted that we probably fail to see anything noteworthy in the interruption of work by the recurrence of night; and yet, conceivably at least, it might have been ordered otherwise. Man might have been so fashioned as to be a continuously working being, exposed to no such regulated interruption. And this enforced suspension of activity cannot but suggest a meaning. It suggests not merely the limited stock of strength at our disposal, which thus needs to be regularly refreshed and replenished, but it also reminds us that we have a higher life than that which is represented and made the most of by the activity of this life, a life which will last when all that belongs to this shall have passed away, a life for the nutriment and development of which God invites us to make provision, lest we should be swept without thought down the stream of time into the vast eternity that awaits us.

O what are these Spirits that o'er us creep,
And touch our eyelids and drink our breath?
The first, with a flower in his hand, is Sleep;
The next, with a star on his brow, is Death.[1]

2. Again, night suggests *danger*. The daylight is of itself protection. When daylight is withdrawn much becomes possible which it forbids. Night is the opportunity of wild beasts and of evil men; they ply their trade during its dark and silent hours. And thus St. Paul describes the workers of darkness as 'unfruitful,' and the thief to whose stealthy approach our Lord compares th unexpectedness of His second coming is 'a thief in the night.' If, indeed, St. Paul were to visit London, say on the afternoon of a Bank Holiday, it is to be feared that he would have to reconsider his remark, based upon the observation of only pagan cities, that 'they that be drunken are drunken in the night.' But, at any rate, it is still true upon the whole that night is the appropriate and recognized season of peril and disaster.

¶ The light was fading ere they reached the landing beach for Ekenge, and there was yet the journey of four miles through the dripping forest to be overtaken. It was decided that she should go ahead with the children in order to get them food and put them to sleep, and that Mr. Bishop and one or two men should follow with dry clothes, cooking utensils, and the door and window needed for the hut, whilst the carriers would come on later with the loads. As Mary faced the forest, now dark and mysterious, and filled with the noises of night, a feeling of helplessness and fear came over her. What unseen perils might she not meet? What would she find at the end? How would she be received on this occasion? Would the natives be fighting or drinking or dancing? Her heart played the coward; she felt a desire to turn and flee. But she remembered that never in her life had God failed her,

[1] R. Buchanan, from *My Commonplace Book*, 114.

not once had there been cause to doubt the reality of His guidance and care. Still the shrinking was there; she could not even move her lips in prayer; she could only look up and utter inwardly one appealing word, 'Father!'[1]

3. A third aspect of the night is, that it is a time during which *God often speaks solemnly to the soul of man.* We are accustomed to think of sleeplessness as a great misfortune, and yet sleeplessness may be a very great blessing if we are open to its many opportunities. Never does God speak more solemnly, more persuasively, to the human soul than during the waking hours of the night. Within us is a voice which speaks for God incessantly, and during the hours of business and of pleasure it is silenced by the many-tongued clamour around us, or its lessons are forgotten amid the distraction of a thousand competing interests. In the silent night conscience has its chance, conscience speaks, and we listen. The past rises at the bidding of conscience; it rises as from the dead. Neglected opportunities, unresisted sins, disregarded warnings, profound degradations—all rise, pressing eagerly, one after another, for recognition by the eye of the soul. The unseen is felt to be what it always is—near and importunate; the duties of time are, for the moment, illuminated by the light of eternity, and we listen to the awful undertone of all human existence. Then it is that religion asserts its empire, and we acknowledge to ourselves with sorrow how much we have overlooked, or forgotten, or despised that had the primary claim upon us.

¶ Have you ever noticed the great clock of St. Paul's? At mid-day in the roar of business, how few hear it but those who are close to it! But when the work of the day is over and silence reigns in London, then it may be heard for miles around. That is just like the conscience of an impenitent man.[2]

4. But night has also its blessed experiences. When the Lord visits us in the night, when heart meets heart in fellowship of love, communion brings first peace, then rest, and then joy of soul. It is no emotional excitement rising into fanatical rapture, but sober fact, to say that the Lord's great heart touches ours, and our heart rises into sympathy with Him.

(1) First, we experience *peace.* All war is over, and a blessed peace is proclaimed; the peace of God keeps our heart and mind by Christ Jesus.

Peace, perfect peace? in this dark world of sin!
The blood of Jesus whispers peace within.

Peace, perfect peace? with sorrows surging round!
On Jesus' bosom nought but calm is found.

(2) At such a time there is a delightful sense of *rest;* we have no ambitions, no desires. A Divine serenity and security envelop us. We have no thought of foes, no fears, or afflictions, or doubts. There is a joyous laying aside of our own will. We are nothing, and we will nothing; Christ is everything, and His will is the pulse of our soul. We are perfectly content either to be ill or to be well, to be rich or to be poor, to be slandered or to be honoured, so that we may but abide in the love of Christ. Jesus fills the horizon of our being.

(3) At such a time a flood of great *joy* fills our minds. We almost wish that the morning may never break again, for fear its light should banish the superior light of Christ's presence. But, after all, there is no great actual distance between earth and heaven: the distance lies in our dull minds. When the Beloved visits us in the night, He makes our chambers to be the vestibule of His palace-halls. Earth rises to heaven when heaven comes down to earth.

Dear night! this world's defeat;
The stop to busie fools; care's check and curb;
The day of Spirits; my soul's calm retreat
Which none disturb!
Christ's progress and his prayer time;
The hours to which high Heaven doth chime.

[1] *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 64.
[2] J. C. Ryle.

God's silent, searching flight:
When my Lord's head is filled with dew, and all
His locks are wet with the clear drops of night;
His still, soft call:
His knocking time; the soul's dumb watch,
When spirits their Fair Kindred catch.

Were all my loud, evil days,
Calm and unhaunted as is Thy dark Tent,
Whose peace but by some Angel's wing or voice
Is seldom rent;
Then I in Heaven all the long year
Would keep, and never wander here.[1]

Purpose.

Ps. xvii. 3.—'I am purposed.'

We often fail to exercise the will. We are proud to possess the power of self-determination, and vehemently vindicate the fact of free-will; yet in actual life we are content to drift; rarely do we really exercise the sovereign power.

1. A recent writer remarks: 'What passes for a will is usually a chaotic lot of indecisions. Indeed nothing is more helpless than the will power of a large part of human beings.' Marked improvement would soon be manifest in all spheres if men habitually cultivated the will and put more force into their high resolves; but unfortunately we are usually content to see dimly, feel faintly, and decide weakly. And life becomes a series of ineffectual struggles, in which it is often hard to distinguish success from failure.

In practical life a definite and tenacious will counts for much. I 'have half a mind to do it,' we sometimes say. What a curious thing is half a mind. Where are the great pictures it has painted, the books it has written, the palaces it has built? Where are the mountains it has scaled, the battles it has won, the continents it has discovered? What is done with half a mind no one cares to look upon; the sickly and abortive efforts are soon and best forgotten. But when we make up our mind, determine once for all, take a stand, put our heart into a thing, it means a great deal in any line of life. Medical authorities are now realizing more frankly the power of the imagination and will to create and direct physical conditions. They see that the imagination is a creative force; that will power is a scientific power; and more and more they aim at securing physiological effects by exciting the imagination, and setting the will to work. A healthy and hopeful will works wonders. 'What doctor possesses such curative resources as those latent in a spark of happiness or a single ray of hope? The mainspring of life is the heart.' And if the resolute, inflexible, energetic mind is so potent in questions of circumstance and health, its sphere is yet far wider and its influence far more emphatic in regard to the safeguarding and building up of character.

¶ The circumstances of life are the great school for forming and strengthening the will, and in the excessive competition and struggle of modern industrialism this school is not wanting. But in ethical and educational systems the value of its cultivation is often insufficiently felt. Yet nothing which is learned in youth is so really valuable as the power and the habit of self-restraint, of self-sacrifice, of energetic, continuous and concentrated effort. In the best of us evil tendencies are always strong and the path of duty is often distasteful. With the most favourable wind and tide the bark will never arrive at the harbour if it has ceased to obey the rudder. A weak nature which is naturally kindly, affectionate and pure, which floats through life under the impulse of the feelings, with no real power of self-restraint, is indeed not without its charm, and in a well-organized society, with good surroundings and few temptations, it may attain a high degree of beauty; but its besetting failings will steadily grow; without fortitude, perseverance and principle, it has no recuperative energy, and it will often end in a moral catastrophe which

[1] Henry Vaughan.

natures in other respects much less happily compounded would easily avoid. Nothing can permanently secure our moral being in the absence of a restraining will basing itself upon a strong sense of the difference between right and wrong, upon the firm groundwork of principle and honour.

Experience abundantly shows how powerfully the steady action of such a will can operate upon innate defects, converting the constitutionally idle into the indefatigably industrious, checking, limiting and sometimes almost destroying constitutional irritability and vicious passions. The natural power of the will in different men differs greatly, but there is no part of our nature which is more strengthened by exercise or more weakened by disuse.[1]

2. This is equally true in regard to our moral and spiritual life. James Smetham has a suggestive passage on this particular point: 'A thought that has been much in mind lately is that it is really possible by direct intention and effort to improve—a simple thought enough, but a very influential one when entertained with the heart. That vague purposeless feeling one sometimes has originates in the want of faith in the truth I have named. We look on change for the better as something which will perhaps come to us some day in a burst, lighting up all with a new brilliancy, and sending all forward with new impetus and strength. No, it won't. I confess that I have been too superstitious in this matter, and have forgotten that improvement is a thing of growth—gradual, silent, steady, and the offspring of direct, continuous effort and will. Not that will can change the heart; but it can set the mind and heart in motion towards him who can do it.' Many drift idly as Smetham did, instead of energetically seeking to work out their salvation.

'I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress.' Thus resolving, we master the tongue and put a bridle on our lips. We so often transgress with our mouth because we have not definitely and firmly determined upon its government. 'He shall not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord' (Ps. cxii. 7). We are afraid of evil tidings, and lack courage because our faith is not steeled by a sanctified will, settled and steadfast. 'But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank' (Dan. i. 8). The solemn purpose in our heart to maintain temperance and purity will render us invincible. 'He exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart, they would cleave unto the Lord' (Acts xi. 23). If our consecration to Christ is thus determinate and final, we need not fear temptation and persecution. Let us not be dismayed; there is a strange depth of power within us if only we will call upon it. 'I see what I want, and I do it,' said one of our great painters; such language is most becoming on our lips who believe in God and in His grace which can more than fulfil all our desire.

¶ On one occasion, in the early days of her work, three of her friends came to see Frances, and being 'greatly roused over an act of grave injustice towards her, were freeing their minds about the offender.' Miss Willard listened to them only for a short time. Then she fetched her Bible and opened at Ps. xvii. 3, 'I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress.' 'I am going to sign off from speaking ill of people,' she said, 'and I want you to take this pledge with me.' It was in this spirit that she met all temptations to think evil, and she kept her pledge most loyally.[1]

The Apple of the Eye.

(For Children).

Ps. xvii. 8.—'Keep me as the apple of the eye.'

What is the 'apple of the eye'? It is the little round black spot in the very centre which we call the pupil. Of all the parts of the eye that we can see, the pupil is the most

[1] W. E. H. Lecky, *The Map of Life*, 251.

[1] R. Strachey, *Frances Willard, Her Life and Work*, 222.

important, because it is through it that the light enters, and if anything happens to injure it seriously we become blind.

When the Psalmist wants God to keep him very safe he asks Him to keep him as the apple of the eye. I wonder what he means by that?

1. Well, first, I think he wants to be protected by a great many safeguards. If you read a little farther in the Psalm you will see that the Psalmist is surrounded by many fierce enemies, both seen and unseen. Some of them he compares to a lion 'greedy of his prey' and 'a young lion lurking in secret places,' and he feels that he needs to be specially taken care of.

Now the eye is a delicate organ and can very easily be hurt, but it is specially taken care of. God has taken pains to protect it.

Would you like to hear about some of its defences?

First there are the outworks—the eyebrows, and the eyelashes, and the eyelids. And what are their uses? The eyebrows prevent the moisture of the brow from running down into the eyes. That moisture is really poisonous, and besides blurring our vision would injure our eyes. The eyelashes act as a sort of curtain to keep out small insects or specks of dust that might hurt. The eyelids are like strong swing doors that close immediately and involuntarily at the approach of danger.

Then the eyeball is surrounded by a bony socket which is like a strong wall all round it, and it rests on a sort of bed of fat on which it can move with ease and safety. Above the eyeball and a little to the outer side is the tear-gland which provides another safeguard. Every time we wink, a tear from this gland pours over the surface of our eyes and washes the eyeball. You know how your eye waters if you get a fly or a bit of grit in it. That is just the tear-gland working extra hard to remove it.

So you see in how many different and wonderful ways the pupil of the eye is protected. And God keeps us in just as many and in just as wonderful ways. Every day we are being kept from dangers, and from evils, and from temptations of which we know nothing.

Do you know the hymn 'Jesus, Lover of my soul'? There is a very interesting story connected with that hymn which Henry Drummond used to tell.

One Sunday evening some of the passengers on board a big Atlantic liner had met in the cabin to sing hymns. By and by they began to sing 'Jesus, Lover of my soul,' and one passenger, an American, heard behind him a very fine voice that seemed familiar to him. When the music stopped he turned round and asked the owner of the voice if he had fought in the Civil War. The man replied that he had fought on the Confederate side. Then the first man asked his new acquaintance if he, by any chance, had been at a certain place on a certain night. 'Yes,' replied the other, 'and while we were singing that hymn something that happened that night came back to me very vividly. I was on sentry duty on the edge of a wood, and I was feeling rather lonely and frightened as the enemy were known to be not far off. About midnight, I grew very weary and miserable and home-sick; and to keep up my courage, I began to sing that hymn. When I came to the verse:—

> All my trust on Thee is stayed;
> All my help from Thee I bring;
> Cover my defenceless head
> With the shadow of Thy wing.

a strange peace seemed to descend on me, and I was no more afraid.'

Then the first man told his story. 'I also,' he said, 'fought in the Civil War, but I was on the Union side. On that night I was out with a party of scouts in the place of which you spoke. We saw you standing on the edge of the wood and my men had their rifles pointed at you and were ready for the word to fire. But just then you began to sing, and when you came to the words—

> Cover my defenceless head
> With the shadow of Thy wing—

I said, 'Boys, lower your rifles; we will go home.'

2. And then I think the Psalmist asked to be kept as the apple of the eye because our eyesight is very precious to us. Of all the five senses, sight is the most valuable. We could get along better without any one of the others than without it. Just think, for instance, how helpless a blind man is compared with a deaf one. And think what care you take of your eyes. If danger is near you put up your hand at once to defend them.

Well, God takes just as much care of you. Once a little boy was standing with his father on the top of the Cheviot Hills. The father pointed northward over Scotland, southward over England, eastward over the North Sea, and westward over hill and dale, and then he said, 'Johnny, my boy, God's love is as big as all that.' 'Why, father,' said Johnny, 'then we must be in the very middle of it.' Yes, we are right in the middle of God's love, and that is the safest place we can be in. Nothing can ever really hurt or harm us there—not sin, nor sorrow, nor even death at last. That God gave so much—His only Son to redeem us—shows how precious we are; and He keeps us safe because we are precious.

3. Again, I think the Psalmist asks to be kept as the apple of the eye because the eye is so sensitive. It feels pain if the tiniest insect or the smallest bit of grit enters it.

In the Book of Zechariah there is a verse very similar to this one. God is speaking of His chosen people and He says that he that toucheth them 'toucheth the apple of His eye.' That just means that he who hurts them hurts God. And I think those words are meant for all God's children in all ages—he who hurts them hurts God.

When Lord Kitchener was Governor, or Sirdar, as he was called, of the Soudan, he was very strict about guarding the rights of the natives. If a soldier injured a native in any way, even one of the poorest and meanest, the matter was inquired into, and the soldier, if guilty, was severely punished. Kitchener was so careful about this and so jealous of the rights of the natives, that it came to be a sort of proverb in the army, 'If you strike a native you strike the Sirdar.'

So the smallest trouble or pain you experience hurts God. Did you ever think of it in that way? God feels all your little sorrows and troubles just as though they had happened to Him, and He feels them far more than you do.

The Hebrews called the pupil of the eye the 'little son' or sometimes 'the daughter of the eye' because when you look into the eye of another you see reflected there a little picture of yourself.

God always carries about a picture of you in His eye. He is always thinking about you, and caring for you, and loving you, and He longs for your love too. He has such a great big heart that He can take us all in, and there will always be an empty corner in it till you nestle there.[1]

When I Awake.

Ps. xvii. 15.—'I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.'

THERE is a difference of opinion as to the exact meaning of these words. While the reference is probably to this life, some argue that the singer sings at eventide and looks forward with hope to the morrow, which will be less troubled than to-day has been; in other words, that the awaking referred to is the purely natural awaking after a night's sleep. Others, again, think that the language is that of metaphor, the Psalmist merely wishing to say that, when the dark night of adversity has passed away, the morning of prosperity will dawn. But the words 'whose portion is in this life' (v. 14) at least suggest that he means something more than this, and that the awakening to which he looks forward with confidence will be on the morning of that glorious day which shall know no eventide.

1. In the Psalmist's view, the moment of death is the moment of awaking. In life we sleep, in death we awake. Our faculties are now comparatively dormant, and will not

[1] *The Children's Great Texts of the Bible*, iii. 5.

fully awaken till we have passed. Besides these powers that we know, it may be that there are others which are still absolutely dormant and of which we shall know nothing till we are free, just as the infant is unconscious of the noble faculties and capacities that will one day exalt him to be a king among his fellows. It is thus that the organ tones sleep under the touch of a novice, to awake in thunder beneath the hand of the master. We are as sleep-walkers, who need to be startled by the shock of death into a true consciousness of existence. We know what it is to be breathlessly interested in a dream; it seems vividly real; the events crowd one upon another, and we live through years in a moment of time; then, all suddenly, we start and cry, 'Where am I? Where have I been?' So will this life seem as we look back on it. Its years will appear as an instant; its absorbing passions as deceptive as the phantasmagoria of a cloud-palace at sunset. And at that hour we shall lose the sense of incompleteness and dissatisfaction which has embittered our earthly lot.

2. In this life who is satisfied? Not the miser, for he continues to rake in his gold, though rich beyond the dreams of avarice and the power of spending, till death surprises him, the muck-rake still in his hand. Not the slave of passion, because his desire far exceeds and outlives the vigour of his physical nature, and burns in his soul long after the power to gratify it has gone. Not the inquirer after truth, for at the end of life, with Newton, he confesses that he is but a child gathering pebbles on the shores of a boundless ocean. Not the conqueror, for when he has reached the limits of the world, he weeps because there is not another world to conquer. Not the wisest and most illustrious of sovereigns, because, with Solomon, he pronounces that all is vanity. Earthly cisterns can hold only brackish water, and not enough of that to satisfy the natures which are fashioned in the image of God. The eye can never be satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing. Incompleteness and enclosing limitation characterize our every experience. Much would have more. If one faculty is satisfied, a hundred others, like a pack of hungry hounds, bay in the court-yard of the soul for food. 'Man never is, but always to be blest.'

¶ The tremendous struggle for material possessions, the drowning of all dignity and seriousness in a round of pleasures, the determination to reach some more comfortable condition of social order; these, so far from being complete indications that man's religious nature is being outgrown, are only signs, when you watch them carefully, that man is profoundly unhappy and disturbed. The craving for material possessions is a sort of diabetes, ever acquiring and yet never satisfied; the demand for continual amusement is a sort of brain fever, the breakdown of the mind under its unsatisfied desires; the passion for social reform is only the reflex of the search of man's soul for the city of God. The psycho-analysts, who are now so busy about our disordered minds, find in our dreams the traces of unfulfilled desires; they might well regard human life in the main as nothing else. For it is obvious that there is no state of material prosperity that ever gives a man the security that he feels he must have; the more you have between you and any conceivable catastrophe, the less secure you feel; the beggar in the ditch has less care about the future than the millionaire; the round of pleasures only wakes in man deeper dissatisfaction, leaves his heart, after all its gaiety and laughter, more depressed and near to tears; all social advance sets us longing for something that social advance cannot of itself provide. These are all signs that the soul of man is not dead; they are signs that the soul is seeking everywhere but the right place for satisfaction; but there is also abundant sign that no one is being satisfied by this business.[1]

¶ In a vignette by the poet Blake one sees a ladder set up to the crescent moon from a bare and desolate corner of the earth. Two figures are shown conversing together. On the ladder itself, just placing his foot on the lowest rung, is the figure of a man who is beginning to climb in a great hurry. The

[1] W. E. Orchard, *The Safest Mind Cure*, 181.

thought of the artist stands revealed in the words inscribed beneath, 'I want, I want.' That tiny woodcut aptly portrays the nature of man. From every organ and power within him the cry goes up continually 'I want, I want.' But the thing desired often contains as little power to permanently satisfy the craving its possession promised to appease, as the crescent moon.[1]

3. But in the hereafter all this will be ended. We are told that yonder they rest, and yet they rest not day or night. They rest not because there is no weariness or exhaustion of their immortal faculties. No night is needed, with its interspace of quiet and refreshment, to cool the over-heated machinery of the soul. But amid all the ceaseless movement of the other world there is the rest of absolute contentment, the satisfaction of the soul's thirst up to its measure. Our capacity will always be growing, so that, though always full, the cup, by its inherent power of expansion, will always be capable of receiving more. There will be no limit except to be filled unto all the fullness of God. Our desire to know will be satisfied, because we shall know as we are known. Our desire for love will be satisfied, because love will be at its full in a world filled by God, who is Love. Our desire to possess will be satisfied, because we shall be no longer children, governed by tutors and governors, but shall have come into our inheritance. Our desire to serve will be satisfied, for the boundless opportunity of our environment will be matched by the boundless strength of our endowment.

¶ The opening words of Father John's *My Life in Christ* are: Thou, O God, hast opened wide to me Thy truth and Thy verity. By instructing me in the sciences, Thou hast opened to me all the riches of faith, of Nature, and of human understanding; I have learned Thy word—the Word of God—'piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit.' I have studied the laws regulating the mind of man, its love of wisdom, the formation and the beauty of speech; I have penetrated in part into the mysteries of Nature, into her laws, into the abyss of the creation of worlds and their revolution; I know the population of the terrestrial globe; I have acquainted myself with its different peoples, with the celebrated persons, and their works, who have passed in turn through this world; I have in part studied the great science of self-knowledge and of how to draw nigh to Thee; in a word, I have become cognisant of many, many things—'for more things are shewed unto thee than men understand,' and hereafter I shall yet learn much. I have many books of very varied contents; I have read and re-read them, but still I am not yet satisfied. My spirit still thirsts for further knowledge and my heart is unsatisfied; it hungers, and from all the knowledge thus acquired by the intellect, it cannot gain full happiness. When will it be satisfied? It will be satisfied, when I will behold Thy face in righteousness: 'I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness.' Until then I shall hunger. 'Whosoever drinketh of this water (of worldly wisdom) shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life,' said the Lord.[1]

[1] A. H. Stockwell.

There is a land where every pulse is thrilling
With rapture earth's sojourners may not know;
Where Heaven's repose the weary heart is stilling,
And peacefully life's time-toss'd currents flow.

Far out of sight, while yet the flesh infolds us,
Lies the fair country where our hearts abide,
And of its bliss is nought more wondrous told us
Than these few words: 'I shall be satisfied.'

Satisfied! satisfied! the spirit's yearning
For sweet companionship with kindred minds;
The silent love that here meets no returning,
The inspiration which no language finds.

[1] Father John Sergieff, *My Life in Christ*, 1.

Shall they be satisfied?—the soul's vague longings,
The aching void which nothing earthly fills?
O what desires upon my soul are thronging,
As I look upward to the heavenly hills!

Thither my weak and weary feet are tending—
Saviour and Lord with Thy frail child abide:
Guide me toward home, where, all my wanderings ended,
I then shall see Thee and 'be satisfied.'

The Present Vision.

Ps. xvii. 15.—'I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.'

THE tendency of Christian believers to fix thought upon the deeper joys of the resurrection life is so prevalent that the blessedness of present realities is greatly minimized, if not altogether obscured. It is because of this fact in Christian experience that such words as, 'I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness' and similar passages, are so generally taken as referring to the future life quite apart from the present; whereas, no doubt, on reflection it will readily be seen that they bear little or no relation to the future. Such words are constantly used as referring to the awaking from the sleep of death. But the Old Testament Jew knew little or nothing of the future life; therefore his thoughts would naturally be centred upon the present realities and enjoyment of Jehovah's Presence; and a true realization of that Presence and the nearness of God is heaven upon earth to the present-day Christian believer.

The last verse of the previous Psalm gives strong encouragement to this thought. 'In thy presence is fulness of joy,' says the Psalmist; and surely he was referring to present experience here upon earth. All through the Psalms there is constant indication of an eager desire—a 'panting' for God; and the petition, 'Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance,' clearly indicates the desire for present experience. In the Psalm before us, the singer is drawing a contrast between 'men of the world' who 'have their portion in this life' and himself as he turns from material things to the spiritual, and he exclaims, 'As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness.' It is therefore the consciousness of God as a reality in the present, rather than the anticipation of a future experience to which he refers when he says, 'I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.' The Septuagint has it, 'I shall be satisfied when thy glory appears'—when I realize the manifestation of Thyself.

1. Now this manifestation, this seeing God, —so satisfying to the believing soul—is the reward of righteousness: 'I will behold thy face in righteousness.' Jesus declares in the beatitude that it is the pure in heart who see God; and the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews bids us 'follow . . . holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.' Nothing can be conceived of as being more satisfying, or a greater privilege, than this beholding God. Yet it can be a present experience, and the thought of it is not to be relegated to the future life only. 'No man hath seen God at any time'—that is to say, in any material sense—but it is possible to behold the Lord in a more real and blessed, because spiritual, manner. Jesus plainly refers to this in His declaration to His disciples: 'A little while and ye shall not see me; and again a little while and ye shall see me' (John xvi. 16). Though the Authorized Version has 'see' in both places, the Revised Version has 'behold' and 'see'; and there is good reason for this, because the two Greek words used are totally different; the word used in the first instance refers to seeing with the bodily organ, and the word in the other signifies inward perception, or inward vision. The statement of Jesus therefore becomes at once intelligible; the disciples were shortly to be denied their Lord's bodily Presence—beholding Him no more; but they would have the greater and more permanent blessing of a continual inward vision of Him. The Christian believer therefore can 'see God' in a spiritual sense by a living faith. With the 'pure in heart' there is nothing to prevent

the direct contact of the soul with God. And who can limit the blessedness and power of this beholding God! What purity of heart and life there must be to maintain this spiritual enjoyment. Sin separates. Only the child of God 'sees' God. God does not reveal Himself to the impenitent. The sceptic in his blindness of soul, or the impure man in the darkness of his sin, has no capacity to see God. 'A head illumined by knowledge, however great, is a very different thing from a heart enlightened by faith.' No faith, no vision. There must be the right moral capacity; not the mere possession of faith, but the exercise of faith—a living faith; a faith which reaches out and is unsatisfied until it touches and can see.

¶ What is it to see God? Rare souls may have the vision through a life of spiritual contemplation. A seer like Blake could not remember a time when the unseen was not real to him. The child of four years old who declared that he saw God through a window was father of the man who died singing heavenly melodies. But what is the vision granted to the man with clouded soul, yet ever peering to discover signs of the Divine presence? We may learn from one, who made no Christian profession yet recognized this Beatitude as the kernel of Christ's teaching. 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' 'Blessed are those who have preserved internal sanctity of soul; who are conscious of no secret deceit; who are the same in act as they are in desire; who conceal no thought, no tendencies of thought, from their own conscience; who are faithful and sincere witnesses, before the tribunal of their own judgments, of all that passes within their mind. Such as these shall see God in Nature and in Man himself. Responsive to the divine moods of Nature which improve and soften the heart, sharing the best thoughts of mankind, maintaining the strictest correspondence between thought and speech, speech and truth, we have intercourse with the Universal God in whom we live and move and have our being.' [2]

[1] Shelley, *Essay on Christianity.*
[2] M. Devine, *The Religion of the Beatitudes*, 121.

2. So, then, there is a demand for the right moral condition, if we would see God; holiness, without which no man can see Him. Purity of heart, of desire, of motive—these are the essentials to our seeing God. And when that 'likeness' of God is seen, what a power it is in the believer's experience, in guarding the sanctity and preserving the purity of a holy life! The Psalmist would say, 'When I awake'—awake from sin which blinds and obscures—'and behold thy face in righteousness'—through which only pure eyes can see—'I shall be satisfied.' 'In God's light we shall see light.' To many this glorious vision has come, and they know the rapturous joy and satisfaction of it; to all it will come, if there is a desire for it. 'Faith never goes home with an empty basket.' 'Ask, and ye shall receive,' in this matter also—the 'beholding of His face in righteousness.'

The Cost of Prayer.

Ps. xviii. 1-19.

What is the use of prayer? We often ask ourselves this question, and we do not always find it easy to answer. We have heard so much about the power of prayer; we have been told that more things are wrought by it than this world dreams of; yet, when we pray, nothing happens.

Is that so? Does nothing really happen? Before we make up our minds upon this question, let us consider the spiritual experience recorded in the eighteenth Psalm.

The writer of the Psalm sets down for us the story of something wonderful that happened in his inner life. It marked an epoch in the story of his soul. He had always believed in God, and had often lifted up the soul to Him in prayer. This religion and these prayers had been very real. Yet it is clear that up to this time what was deepest in him had never been stirred. And God used the sting of a great anguish to awaken the Psalmist's soul to the true meaning and grandeur of prayer. We are not told what special trouble had befallen him; the poet is interested in outward events only in so far

as they give the occasion for the cry of the soul and the intervention of God. The facts of the external history are not known to us, but the man's emotions are as fresh and vivid to us to-day as when they first found utterance. He had enemies, and they were too strong for him. The 'cords of Sheol' were round about him, and the 'snares of death' came upon him. He was in utter despair; an insignificant lonely creature encompassed by foes whose triumph meant to him somehow the defeat of God Himself. And, at last, he prayed—prayed as he had never prayed before; the soul in him reaching out to and laying hold on God with passionate determination. And then something happened. In describing the event many physical terms are used, but we must keep fast hold of this—that the experience described took place within the man's own soul. In that soul something took place in answer to the impassioned prayer, and the Psalmist was assured that there was something happening in God Himself to account for the overwhelming vision that came to him. God 'bowed the heavens and came down'; that is how he describes it. And when the commotion subsided, and the tumult died away, the Psalmist found that his prayer was answered —'He drew me out of many waters: he delivered me.' From that day onward he possessed a new understanding of God, a new trust in the power of prayer, and a perfect peace amid all the crowding troubles of life.

1. From this we learn, first, *the mighty power that prayer calls into operation.*

We sometimes hear people speak of the mighty power of prayer, as if the power resided in the human petition. Of course, it is not so; what lies behind prayer is the mighty power of God. Prayer is simply the weak human hand which lays hold of the hand of God. That power is always in operation; but human hearts are often closed to its influence, and even antagonistic to it. Prayer opens the heart, and the moment it is opened God enters.

We have an imperfect illustration of this in the engine room of a great mill. Everywhere wheels are spinning, and work is being done; all the power is concentrated in one single room. There we behold the engine which does the work, and transmits the power to all parts of the building. We look at the huge engine with a kind of awe; the forces which it brings into play are so tremendous and irresistible, the structure itself is so huge, that we feel small and weak as we stand there. Yet a weak man like ourselves lays a hand gently on a little bar of steel, moves it gently, and immediately the mass of machinery leaps into activity. The power was not created by the directing hand: it was released.

And as the touch on the lever brings all that magnificent power into play, so does an act of sincere prayer set free immeasurable Divine activities. The Psalmist is caught up by mighty forces which seem about to overpower him, when, all of a sudden, he discovers that he has his hand upon the lever, and can call into action and direct the unmeasured might of God. 'The earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the mountains were moved. The channels of waters appeared, and the foundations of the world were laid bare.' All this, and more, came between the prayer and its answer.

2. In this Psalm, too, we find confirmation of a very familiar truth, which is that *God cares very tenderly for the individual soul.*

We are daunted and dismayed by the infinite, about which we hear so much in these days. Science has overwhelmed us with the revelation of the infinitude of space; it has revealed to us the depths of the heavens, the awful gulfs in the midst of which our little planet is swung, the intolerable distances of the stars. The universe seems to us enormous, and very cold. In our despair we recall the prayer of the Breton sailors: 'God have pity on us; the sea is so great and our barque is so small.'

Philosophers have endeavoured to familiarize our minds with the conception of the Absolute—the All of thought of which our own minds are but fragments, and into which

our poor human reason will ultimately be absorbed.

Others have laboured to impress on our minds the infinity of God, and the infinite smallness of our single personalities. They discourage us by telling us we are of small importance and significance, and that the best we can hope for is to be swallowed up in the universal and eternal.

In all this there is little comfort for the struggling unit. In the midst of all these infinities the soul of man feels lost and lonely, and yearns for something warm and personal. Man cannot love and trust an abstraction named the Absolute or the All. Instinctively, almost, and compelled by a deep impulse, we fall on our knees and pray to our Father who is in heaven; we cast ourselves upon His care, and entrust ourselves to His love. This is the very meaning and essence of prayer. I pray, not with any desire to be merged and lost in the unknown sea of God, but because I am sure that He loves me, and that He made my separate soul because He wished it to be separate, and loves me myself. I believe that my individual needs and wants are known to Him, and are matter for His care. That is why Christians pray. And that is why the Psalmist prayed. He made a dazzling discovery as he prayed: he found out through the moving experience of his soul that all these infinities that terrify us are under personal control, and are bent and ordered by God so as to answer our deep need. And that is the discovery of everyone who earnestly and sincerely prays. The heavens are far and high; but 'He bowed the heavens also, and came down'; the darkness oppresses and overawes me; but 'He made darkness his hiding place, his pavilion round about him; darkness of waters, thick clouds of the skies.' And the end of it all is—'He drew me out of many waters; he delivered me.'

3. We also learn from this Psalm that *it costs God something to answer prayer.*

We have accustomed our minds to a conception of prayer that belittles its glory, and degrades the character of God. We imagine it is a light thing for God to answer prayer. We say to ourselves: He has but to speak the word, and it is done; so infinite is His power that His expressed will is immediately translated into actual fact. This is to ignore the truth suggested by the Psalm, that in the answer to prayer, and in the accomplishment of the Divine purpose, tremendous spiritual forces are called into action. If God had but to speak, and it was done, why should He take six days to create the world? Or, if objection is offered to that primitive way of expressing it, let us ask why God did not bring this universe into perfect being by the fiat of His will, but subjected it to a long process of struggle and painful evolution.

We say it with reverence, but there are limits to the Almightiness of God. There are certain things He cannot do by the mere word of His power. He cannot do that which is evil, nor can He simply obliterate sin, so that the universe should be as though sin had never been. He cannot with a word create a perfect human soul.

In the way of God's purposes, and for a time hindering them, stands the fact of sin. Why it should be so we may not be able to understand, but surely the fact is unquestioned. God cannot with a simple command overcome this obstacle; He, too, must use ways and means. And the picture given us in this Psalm shows us how the truth dawns upon the Psalmist that between his prayer and God's answer there intervenes a stupendous convulsion of Nature, and also some immeasurable upheaval in the Divine nature. What he dimly saw, we can now more clearly understand since Jesus Christ died upon the Cross. We pray to God: 'Be merciful to me, a sinner,' and we believe that He blots out our sins; but not by the mere word of His power. Before He can do that there must somehow take place a Divine conquest of sin. Between the prayer and its answer comes this upheaval which is pictured in the Psalm by symbols drawn from the material world. Between the prayer for pardon and the forgiveness of our sins there comes the Divine conquest of sin, and that took place, with

every accompaniment of pain and anguish and death, darkness without and darkness within, upon the Cross. So we find that in every prayer there is hidden the light and shadow, the terror and glory of the Cross.

Prayer, which costs so much to answer, is not to be lightly regarded or offered, for in prayer we take our part in the sufferings and in the victory of Jesus Christ.[1]

In the anguish of prayer
It is well! it is well!
Then only the victory of love is complete,
When the soul on the cross
Dies to all save its loss
When in utmost defeat
The light that was fair
And the friend who was sweet
Flee away, then the truth of its love is laid bare
In the anguish of prayer.[2]

Out of Many Waters.

Ps. xviii. 16.—'He sent from above (RV 'on high'), he took me, he drew me out of many waters.'

It is common in the Old Testament for a verb to be inserted as a mere auxiliary to the principal verb. It does not mark a separate act, but gives vividness to the one act expressed. So here 'He sent from above, he took me' does not mean that a messenger was sent but that God Himself stretched forth His hand to save. This idiom is imitated in the New Testament. Thus we have 'answered and said,' where no question has been asked: Luke v. 31, ix. 49; Matt. xxvi. 63. With the verb 'to go': Matt. ix. 13, 'Go and learn'; xxv. 16, 'he went and traded'; Luke xv. 15, 'he went and joined himself to a citizen,' and elsewhere. With the verb 'to take': 'David took and ate the shewbread,' Luke vi. 4, where Matt. xii. 4 and Mark ii. 26 omit 'took' and; 'leaven which a woman took and hid,' Matt. xiii. 33; Luke xiii. 21.

1. When we observe that the expression translated 'floods of ungodly men,' in the fourth verse, is literally 'floods of wickedness,' in the abstract—the waters of evil—we see that it applies to the unseen foes by which the sinner is surrounded, just as much as to the visible enemies who surged around the Psalmist in the evil days of his life, and to those who mocked and taunted 'the Lord's Anointed' at 'the place called Calvary.' Behold, then, a picture of the sinner! 'The waves of death compassed me, and the floods of wickedness made me afraid. The sorrows of hell compassed me about; the snares of death prevented me.' Are there not many who can look back to the time when these words might describe exactly their experience? For it is a picture of the awakened sinner. These 'waves of death' and 'snares of hell' are around all sinners; but it is only after their eyes have been opened that they see them, and that 'the floods of wickedness,' which threaten to engulf them, really 'make them afraid.' Then it is that 'in their distress they call upon the Lord, and cry unto their God.' How does He answer them? By making the storm a calm all at once? Not always. Very often He answers them just as He answered the Psalmist—in a fiercer storm still. 'The waves of death' seem to rise higher and higher, the heaven above to grow darker and darker, the Sinai fires to burn more and more fiercely, and the terrible voice of God to thunder louder and louder; the very 'foundations of the earth' seem to be 'discovered at his rebuke, at the blast of the breath of his nostrils'; and then it is, when all is at the darkest, when the stage of utter helplessness, and hopelessness, and distrust of all but God Himself, is reached, that He 'stretches out his hand from above,' grasps the helpless sinner, and 'draws him out of the great waters.'

My sorrow had pierced me through; it throbbed in my heart like a thorn;
This way and that I stared, as a bird with a broken limb

[1] J. Macartney Wilson.
[2] Evelyn Underhill, *Theophanies*, 49.

Hearing the hound's strong feet thrust imminent through the corn,
So to my God I turned: and I had forgotten Him.

Into the night I breathed a prayer like a soaring fire;—
So to the windswept cliff the resonant rocket streams,—
And it struck its mark, I know; for I felt my flying desire
Strain, like a rope drawn home, and catch in the land of dreams.

What was the answer? This—the horrible depth of night,
And deeper, as ever I peer, the huge cliff's mountainous shade,
While the frail boat cracks and grinds, and never a star in sight,
And the seething waves smite fiercer;—
and yet I am not afraid.[1]

2. But we have here a picture of salvation from trouble as well as from sin. In David's own case it was a salvation of that kind; and many of the seed of David have a similar experience. Like him they find themselves in a sea of troubles; and like him they seek deliverance by calling upon the Lord, finding, as he found, that prayer is their only effectual weapon. And how often it happens that at first the only answer to the prayer seems to be a darkening of the sky and a rising of the storm. If this should be so, let us not be dismayed, let us still trust in God; for, like David, we 'shall yet praise him.' It is a blessed thing to learn, as David seems to have learnt, that we are to 'trust God at all times;' that we may trust Him in the very darkest hour; that we may trust Him even when it seems that the more we pray the darker the prospect becomes; for we may be sure that He 'knoweth the way which we take'; and though it is 'through fire and water' He will bring His people at last to 'a large and wealthy place.'

¶ The picture before the Psalmist's mind was made real to the eyes of Thomas Spurgeon during a visit to Ireland. He says: 'It was my lot last Monday to visit a place some twenty miles, I suppose, from the city of Dublin, a favourite resort for pleasure seekers and holiday-makers; one of the most striking and beautiful bits of scenery to be discovered even in fair Ireland. I looked from the top of a gigantic archway down into the depths of a sunlit valley. A roaring cascade leaped under my feet, and far down in the bottom of the glade I saw the red coats of the soldiery, for a military picnic, you must know, was in progress and the soldiers and their wives and children were enjoying themselves in this picturesque spot. Presently, I and my friends descended, looking up at the falling waters and gazed at the tall trees that almost spanned the gulf, and, with their bright and fresh green leaves, beautified and blest the scene.

Walking a while amongst the pathways under the steep precipice, my eyes presently discovered, clinging to the rock half-way up the cliff, the form of a young man. I said to the friend who stood beside me, "See yonder man, what does he there? Is he not in a most dangerous predicament? He cannot ascend, for the cliff is too steep above him; he dare not look down, or he would be broken to shivers at the foot of the precipice." And as I looked, my heart beat high with anxiety, till I saw that he was calling out for help, and that some of his brother soldiers on the top of the cliff had heard his cry and were hastening to his relief. Even to me the seconds seemed like minutes, and the minutes grew, or seemed to grow, to hours. What think you, did they seem to him, who at any instant might have been dashed to his death?

There seemed to me to be a good share of bustle and confusion. Hither and thither the men were running. Presently, to my great rejoicing, I saw one hurry up the pathway with a rope. It looked to me to be all too thin and frail and scarcely long enough, and so, indeed, it proved to be; for, as they tried to shake it down to this poor, clinging lad, it soon appeared that it could not reach him. If it had reached him, I doubt very much if

[1] A. C. Benson.

it would have borne his weight and sufficed to pull him up to safety. There was still further delay, but presently we beheld strong men, with strong ropes, hastening to their comrade's rescue. They tied a heavy piece of wood to the end of the rope and then shook it down the acclivity—which though very steep, was cumbered with the trunks and roots of trees—that so the rope might reach the man; and presently—much to our joy we beheld it—the rope reached him and he reached it, for you may be sure he strove as much as he was able to embrace that saving cord. He clutched it with both his hands, and then to my surprise—for I thought he must have been by that time exhausted—he began to climb the cliff. I think he must have been a sailor once, though a soldier now, for he scrambled up that rope hand over fist, and I heard a cheer and voices of congratulation when he was safe once more; and as I saw it, this text came more forcibly than it has ever done before to my mind, 'He sent from above, He took me! He drew me out of many waters'; for certain it is that this poor man had not only been dashed in pieces, but had been submerged by the roaring waters, too, if deliverance had not arrived.'[1]

Largeness.

Ps. xviii. 19.—'He brought me forth also into a large place.'

This has been the song of all God's servants in every age—'He brought me forth into a large place.' Obedience to God never contracts our powers. Christ does not lead men backward, but onward, outward, upward. Matthew was led into a large place when he left the toll-booth to follow Jesus. Peter had never seen anything larger than the Sea of Galilee until Jesus made him a fisher of men. Paul at his best was only a theological hair-splitter, a heresy-hunter, until Christ appeared to him and filled his heart with a passion for the preaching of the gospel and the glory of the Cross. If the voice of Patriarch and Prophet and Apostle could be heard to-day it would cry, 'Never say, "No" to God. If He call thee, go. He will lead thee into a large place.'

There are three measurements we may apply to life. It has height, breadth, length. The ideal life must be lofty, comprehensive, progressive. A life broad in its human sympathies, but destitute of all growth heavenward, would be imperfect. On the other hand, a life exclusively spiritual would be defective. Human claims cannot be neglected. We need breadth as well as height, generous large-heartedness as well as spiritual inspiration. And then, again, height and breadth without length would fail. The work is too great for completion in time. The problems are too vast to find their solution in the present. Man's nature is too great to adjust itself perfectly to this world. The ideal life must reach out into eternity. Such was the life of Christ: to such He would introduce us. In the character of Jesus there was no sign of limitation. He was the Divine type of Humanity: great every way.

> Thou seemest human and divine
> The highest, holiest manhood Thou.

1. The great reason why life is such a mean and poor affair to thousands is that it is not lofty enough. It has no *height*. They live in a world without a sky. There is no upward glance. The world, for them, is without its true counterpart and completion in heaven. There are many people who are full of eager human interests; but in the broadest sense of the word they are worldly-minded. There is no upward movement in their lives. They are without God. They 'mind earthly things.' Business, society, pleasure, art, science, literature occupy their whole thought. And to such the glory fades away out of life. Those who have given up God confess to a sense of utter weariness and despair.

'He brought me forth also into a large place.' Christ is the supreme justification of man's nature. 'Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me.'

[1] W. Y. Fullerton, *Thomas Spurgeon's Biography*, 250.

His life was infinite in its upward reach: Heaven and God were for Him as real as earth and man. Nothing is so certain about the life of Jesus as that He lived and died in the fullest conviction that He was in direct communion with God.

The white doves brood low
With innocent flight.
Higher, my soul, higher!
Into the night!—
Into black night!

Beyond where the eagle
Soars strong to the sun.
Nought hast thou, if only
Earth's stars be won—
Earth's stars are won.

Beyond, where God's angels
Stand silent in might,
Higher, my soul, higher!
Into the light!—
Straight to God's light! [1]

2. The largeness of the ideal life is seen, again, in its infinite *breadth,* in its large-heartedness as in its spirituality. Christianity is free from all narrowness with respect to this life. There is a grand catholicity in it; its interpretation of God, of the world, of life, of duty is broad and spiritual. It fosters no exclusive type of life or worship. It is broad as the love of God. It awakens a deep sense of fellowship among those who differ in many things. It consecrates and glorifies man's whole existence.

We see this noble breadth in the truth Christ taught. There is a breadth of mere intellectual indifference and culture against which we must be on our guard. Men who have received a broad and liberal education, who have read and travelled much, generally rise above mere local caste and national prejudices. They learn to consider all questions in various lights, and to make allowance for the point of view of many observers. That is well. But it often happens that this emancipation of the intellect from the narrowness of caste and creed is accompanied by no firm grasp of vital truths, but by a state of moral and intellectual indifference.

I care not what the sects may brawl,
I sit as God, holding no form of creed,
But contemplating all.

Over against this scornful mood place the freedom of a living faith founded on the deep and yet wonderfully simple truths which Jesus set forth in His life and teaching. There it finds no narrowness but glorious breadth. The Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, the sovereign supremacy of righteousness and love were the great central facts on which He dwelt. Jesus delighted in no theological subtilties. He placed everything on a living faith, on life, character, conduct. And those who turn to His teaching thank God for the broad, free generous spirit which it breathes.

3. The largeness of the life which God bestows upon us is seen, last of all, in its infinite *length.* Every great and true life is a grand argument for immortality. Unless a malignant demon has made us, and rules our destiny, every noble life must be brought into a larger world, where its progress may be continued, and its growth in knowledge and goodness carried on. How can any man truly believe in a good and loving God without also believing in a higher world beyond death, into which we shall pass when we reach the close of our earthly career? Could you believe that God would train us in the knowledge of Himself, that He would awaken in us all generous love and affection for one another, that He would teach us to trust in Him for life and death, and then when the end came suffer us to perish? Could you believe that God would lead a man right on through life up to the moment he enters the Dark Valley, and that then, although he still went on smiling, trusting in God, and saying, 'I will fear no evil: for thou art with me,' God would forsake him, and leave him in his last hour, to drop into silence and darkness for ever. No! beyond the Dark Valley lies a larger,

[1] M. Maartens.

fairer world, and as the earthly vision fades, there will rise a glorious region into which, as the soul enters, it will cry with new wonder: 'Thou hast brought me forth into a large place.'

¶ In Sir Henry Jones' short memoir of his son, who died a lad of sixteen, we find these conclusions: 'I see my boy as part of a world-whole, all sane, all ordered in goodness and in a wisdom deep as the foundations of eternity. He was, if you will, a mere breaking wavelet, or a frail bubble, on the surface of an ocean whose waters submerge space and time, shoreless for ever, and never resting. But 'the ocean' is more than an ocean—it is God; and my lad was more than a bubble—he was a living personality, an incarnation, in his degree, of God's own nature. I turn my back on metaphors that lower spirit to the level of the things of sense. For Nature is not dead, nor are its changes the swinging and breaking of senseless waves. It is spirit incarnate, spirit breaking into manifestations, like a sunbeam into rainbow colours, caught up by the senses and lifted into significance for the mind, purpose for the adventurous will, emotion that gives the worth of things and melts them into unity with the soul and the soul with itself. And Spirit, the Spirit which is eternal, immeasurable God, knows its way; it does not fail, nor pause for death. Death lies in the hollow of His hand, a tame thing and obedient. He guides His own through *Death:* through Death after Death, into Life after Life. And who is not His own?

I see my boy prepared in the womb of things, led through form after form, from stage to stage of being, amidst the low roots of things, emerging ever with some new possibility from some dumb experience deeper than sleep; and at last appearing, not as Nature, but as Spirit, awake and purposive, filled with derived instincts, treasured possibilities, now to break forth into the light of open day, to learn a new communion with the God who guided him through all the darkness of unconscious being. Evolution may be a temporary toy for the growing intellect of man, by which he learns for a little while the uses of his mind, to be broken yet and cast aside. But when it *is* cast aside by man matured, its use, its truth, will remain. It will have left some deeper trust, some clearer view of the stages of the great history through which the life of man is led unerringly—thus far, and how much further?

It is this Spirit-World that I feel all around me when I think of my lad, and which altogether prevents me from calling him 'lost.' It is the living God whose breath moves through human life, like the breeze in a wide forest, stirring its innumerable leaves into the murmur of shoreless music. I am content: I have him yet. We may meet again; for God does not fail, nor spill. I witnessed the dawning blush of a radiant manhood in the boy, the timid peep of a glorious day. If the mist came and surrounded him, will the mist not lift? What is it but a cloud? And clouds flee—leaving the sun one brightness.[1]

Through Prison to Freedom.

Ps. xviii. 19.—'He brought me forth also into a large place.'

THESE words came into my mind once when I was sailing up the Thames. It was to me an unfamiliar stretch of waters. Everything was strangely beautiful. The trees that lined the river banks; the frequent glimpses into the recesses of dark woods; the occasional breaking of the lines, and the surprising vistas of open country; the play of the waterfowl; little children paddling here and there, and their shouts of joy; in quieter places the songs of birds! It was very beautiful. And then we left it all and were shut up in a lock. We were imprisoned within stone walls and iron gates. Not a green thing could be seen. Not a bird could be heard. But in our imprisonment we began to rise. Shut in, we began to be lifted up; until, when we reached the appointed height, the forward gate swung open and we continued our journey on a higher level.

[1] *Life and Letters of Sir Henry Jones*, 300.

And all this became the parable of common experiences in human life. Who does not know God's locks along the river? Who has not had the surprise of being seemingly taken away from joyful progress between the green and happy banks and shut up within black and clammy stones? At such seasons it seems as though we have passed from joyful movement to depressing stagnancy. But in reality the movement has only changed. We have ceased to go on and we have begun to go up. We have been lifted into heavenly places in Christ Jesus. God has redeemed us to higher levels, and when freedom has been restored we find that He has brought us out into a large place. The lock was the minister of elevation. The place of imprisonment was the birthplace of a larger life.

1. Sometimes we have been shut up within the stony prison of *a gloomy disappointment.* Our ambitions have been checked. Our radiant boat has been stayed. And the song has died away. But God has used the dark place of disappointment to minister to another kind of progress. We begin to realize more clearly the 'upward calling in Christ Jesus.' Ambition is changed into aspiration. We rise to higher things. Wonderful deliverances have been wrought in the chill season of disappointment, and God has brought us forth into a larger place. 'The things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.'

2. Or it may be that we have been shut up in the narrow lock of *sickness.* All the ordinary movements in life have stopped. And it seemed to be such a waste. Just to lie on one's back! And then the 'upward' ministries began to lay hold of us, the wonderful things which are from above. And we rose to higher levels of thinking, and feeling, and praying. More of Christ came into our lives, and more Christ-communion. There was more thoughtfulness, and more gentleness, and more vision. And when God opened the gate on the further side, and let us out again, we could certainly sing with the Psalmist, 'In my distress Thou hast enlarged me.' [1]

¶ In the recently published biography of Dr. Jowett we find a short poem written during the last months of his life, when the hand of sickness was heavy upon him. It is an appropriate ending to this sermon.

One night, when busy day was done,
My spoils all ranged in setting sun,
As I reviewed the race well run,
I heard a knocking at my door,
So faint I scarce could hear it!
Not knowing if my sense were vain,
I looked across the window pane,
And saw a presence with a mien
So deeply reverent and serene,
'A kinsman of the Nazarene'
I thought no one could fear it.

I let him in. I bade him rest:
I thought he would have been my guest
A single night, and coming day
Would see the pilgrim on his way
Along his mystic journey:
Yet not as guest but settled friend
It seemed as if he meant to spend
His life with me. I asked his name,
A silence followed, and there came
An air of radiant gentleness,
A warmth of heavenly kindliness,
In height, and depth, and length!
'My name is weakness sent by Love
To change the carnal to the dove,
And clothe thee with the life above
And lead thee into strength.' [2]

Responsiveness.

Ps. xviii. 26.—'With the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure; and with the froward (RV 'perverse') thou wilt shew thyself froward.'

1. God's tender mercies are over all His works; but these works receive His tender mercies in different ways, and are therefore differently affected by them. Our Heavenly Father maketh His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just

[1] J. H. Jowett, *Springs in the Desert*, 25.
[2] P. 299.

and on the unjust; but the evil and the good have different effects produced upon them by the same sun. Just as in Nature the fragrance of the fir-tree comes out in the sunshine, and the fragrance of the birch-tree comes out in the rain, so is it with human beings. The rain falling upon the fir-tree would not bring out its aromatic scent fully, however long it rained, and the sun shining upon the birch-tree would only dry up its sweet perfume and make it almost scentless. God's sun in the heavens shines down over all the earth; but one part of the earth, owing to its position towards the sun, is glowing with summer heat or with daylight, while another part for the same reason is in the gloom of night or in the freezing cold of winter. One part of the same object turned full to the sun shines brightly, while another part inclined at an angle from the sun is in shadow. What is the cause of the different colours of flowers and jewels? The same sun shines on all alike. It is because their own forms and substances take out of the sunshine the peculiar hues that suit them best. A scarlet geranium by some peculiarity of its material and structure reflects the red ray of sunshine and absorbs all the other rays; while a bluebell for the same reason reflects the blue ray and absorbs all the rest. You have a piece of white ivory and a piece of mother-of-pearl shell beside it. The same light falls upon them, but the one presents a uniform white appearance, whereas the other shines with the loveliest iridescent colours. And the reason is because their structure is different.

2. Such is the law of Nature; it is also the law of grace. The same God who is over all, blessed for ever, forms light and creates darkness, makes peace and creates evil, according to the dispositions and natures of human beings. He is to them what they are to Him. He is pure to the pure and froward to the froward. It has been wisely said that we make God in our own image—that we picture our God to be what we are ourselves, only greatly exaggerated. If we are pure, then God is in the highest degree pure to us; if we are froward and obstinate, then our God is only a tyrant to us, ruling by force and not by love. We are so made that we cannot form our picture of God except from materials which we have in ourselves and in our circumstances. A false person cannot conceive of a holy God. He thinks that He is altogether such as himself; that He can be easily cheated by hypocritical or formal worship, and won over by favours and bribes; and he acts accordingly. His whole worship is entirely different from that of the man who is upright, and therefore thinks always of God as of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. How can one who is hard and cold and selfish conceive of a God of love? How can one who loves no one but himself conceive of the infinite sacrifice of the Son of God for sinners? How can he who never gives away anything, or if he does, expects always to get a good return, conceive of God giving to us the blessings of grace without money and without price?

We cannot realize the height of a lofty mountain at its foot; it is much foreshortened to us there. We must ascend to a considerable height on an opposite mountain to see it rise up before us in all its enormous proportions. We must be nearer to the level of that which is above us to know how much it is above us. We must have some poetry in ourselves to appreciate the poetry of Milton and Tennyson. We must have a soul of music in ourselves if the sublime strains of Beethoven are to stir us to the depths of our being. And is it not equally true in religion that we must have the instinct, the experience of religion in ourselves in order to understand the mystery of grace and to be touched by the wonderful story of the Cross? Our ideas of God and Christ, and of all spiritual and eternal things, change with our own growth in heavenly-mindedness, in purity and unselfishness. As we dwell in love, we shall know more of the love that passeth knowledge. As we have the same mind in us that was in Christ Jesus, so we shall find it easier to understand how and why the Son of God should have loved us and given Himself for us.

¶ Until we see clearly that there is 'harmony' between that which we receive and that which we are; until we admit that Divine, like human, influences can only do their work upon the soul through finding a point of contact with it, we are scarcely so alive to the deep moral significance of life as to see how it is through that which we believe, approve, yes, even through that which we like, that the soul is prepared to receive the impress of Cæsar or of God. 'He that is of the truth heareth my voice.' This is a deep saying; so also is that of the prophetic psalm which declares plainly that our Lord reveals Himself under aspects varying with the moral and spiritual conditions of those who look upon Him; 'With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful; with the upright man thou wilt shew thyself upright; with the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward.'[1]

God's Irony.

Ps. xviii. 26.—'With the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward.'

God uses irony in His dealings with men. We have a phrase, 'The irony of events,' which bears witness to our consciousness of the fact. Scripture also declares it. There are perhaps few better examples of the use of irony than Elijah's speech on Mount Carmel, when alone, fighting for life and faith and country, he faced the priests of Baal. Through the long day the priests of Baal cried to their god to answer by fire. They gashed themselves with lancets till the blood ran in streams, they screamed in their paroxysms of prayer till they were hoarse and voiceless. And through all the weary afternoon these spent, exhausted men heard the bitter mocking words which Elijah at noon had hurled at them: 'Cry aloud; for he is a god; either he is musing, or he is gone aside, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth and must be awaked —cry a little louder!' Could any argument or logic or eloquence so effectually bring home to them and Israel their utter failure and the impotence of Baal? And God uses irony. When Balaam sought permission to go with the messengers of Balak God refused. Then, when Balaam's worldly heart prompted him to ask a second time, God consented—but it was in irony. Let us look at one or two instances which illustrate this Divine use of irony.

1. Is it not an irony that the kingdom of good often comes in this world by the victory and not the defeat of the kingdom of evil? Take the classic example—the cross of Christ. The crucifixion of Christ was the triumph of hell. For long months His enemies had plotted: 'If we can but nail Him to a Roman cross He will be discredited, no Jew will follow a crucified Messiah, His influence will be destroyed by the shame.' And at last they succeeded. And there He hung, with the cry wrung from His lips, 'My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?' And they left Him in the hour of darkness with the gibe, 'He saved others; himself he cannot save.' It was the hour of their triumph—nay, was it not rather the hour of their uttermost defeat? For Christ rules the world unto this day because He hung upon that cross, and millions would die for Him because He went out into that 'forsakenness' and, by not saving Himself, saved us.

It is always so. Take an example on another plane. Consider the liquor traffic. Consider its wealth. 'Unless the country controls the liquor traffic, the liquor traffic will control the country,' we are warned. But what hope have we of controlling the liquor traffic? For every agent the temperance party can put into the field, the trade can afford a hundred. They can placard a hoarding with 'Don't rob the working man of his beer!' They can get any number of men for money. Yes; but they cannot get one without. And men on the other side work out of sheer philanthropy. The brewers' money is their weakness. The country is not blind; men know it is a fight between dividends and love, and in the long run disinterestedness, which is more than money or shouting or wire-pulling, is sure to win.

[1] Dora Greenwell, *The Patience of Hope*, 79f.

2. Is it not an irony that men often sin to gain an end, and miss the very end they sin to gain? Take Heine, the second greatest figure in German literature. He looked back longingly to the old Paganism; he loved pleasure, sensation, physical excitement. But while he gained name and influence and an enduring niche in the world's literary pantheon, he missed the physical excitement, the sensual pleasure he sought. For eight years he lay on his 'mattress grave,' as he named it, paralysed, blind of one eye, having to raise the lid of the other with his hand, deserted by his friends, so that he exclaimed, when Berlioz made an unexpected visit, 'You come to see me, you are as original as ever!' As he himself wrote, 'What does it profit me that my health is drunk at banquets out of gold cups and in most exquisite wines, if I myself, while these ovations are going on, lonely and cut off from pleasures of the world, can only just wet my lips with barley water?' As it has been said, 'There can be no greater irony for the soul which has sinned by too greedily seeking for sensation than to find sensation absent even from the judgments she has brought on herself.' Men miss the very end they sin to gain.

3. And is not this an irony that men who reject God and His wisdom often in their calculations miss out the only things which are certain to happen? Death is the one certainty of the future, and these men—perhaps because it is certain and universal—ignore it. The Rich Fool in the Gospel story, for example, laid his schemes for life—you have met such a man—he would make so much wealth and then enjoy himself; till then it should be all labour and no pleasure, afterwards all pleasure and no labour. His friends warned him that God would be offended and defeat him. But at the end of the first year he had prospered beyond anticipation—and God said nothing. Again, a second year his friends warned him, but he did better still—and God said nothing. Again they warned him, but a third and fourth year he did better and better, till the croakers ceased to croak. At last he said, 'One year more and my task is accomplished'—and God said nothing. That year was the best of all, and the barns were stacked to overflowing, and he must needs build greater. Then he exulted in his triumph. 'They said it could not be done, but it is done; they said God would stop me, but I have prospered.' The toil was hard, nothing but toil, but now—And that night God spoke, and said, 'Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee.'

Have you ever read that most dreaded curse of the Old Testament, 'Thou shalt build houses and other men shall live in them, thou shalt plant vineyards and other men shall drink the wine thereof'? What an irony![1]

Oh what is earth, that we should build
Our houses here, and seek concealed
Poor treasure, and add field to field,
And heap to heap, and store to store,
Still grasping more and seeking more,
While step by step Death nears the door?[2]

Light in the Darkness.

Ps. xviii. 28.—'The Lord my God will lighten my darkness.'

For many ages there was no book of merely human authority more highly thought of than the *Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius. Not to go beyond the limits of our own country, it was translated in one century by King Alfred, in another by the poet Chaucer, in another—at least partly—by Queen Elizabeth. And the consideration which it thus enjoyed in England was by no means exceptional, it was but a sample of the common mind of Europe about it down to the end of the sixteenth century. The popularity of the book was due partly to the fact that it embodied much of the best wisdom of the old pagan world, and partly to the tragic circumstances under which it was composed, and which were well fitted to cast a spell upon the

[1] E. A. French, *God's Message Through Modern Doubt*, 2ff.
[2] Christina G. Rossetti.

imagination of later times. Boethius had been the trusted counsellor of Theodoric, the second and greatest Gothic King of Italy after the fall of the Western Roman Empire. Boethius was probably the most honourable man of his day, and he stood as high as any in the estimation of his brave but illiterate sovereign. He was accused of conspiring to re-establish the old Roman imperial power in Italy at the cost of his Gothic master, and upon little or no evidence of guilt was thrown into prison at Pavia, where, after lingering nine or ten months, he was put to a cruel death. It was during this imprisonment that Boethius wrote the *Consolation of Philosophy*. As we read it we never forget the author's circumstances. He paints first of all his own deep dejection, and then, personifying philosophy as a lady who had the air of having lived through centuries, yet bore upon her still the signs of youthful vigour, he describes her visit to his desolate cell. She sits on the edge of his bed, and, looking steadily into the face of her downcast disciple, addresses him in words of pity and of reproof. He tells her his trouble, and she displays the consolation she has to display in the mind of man. True, Boethius has lost everything in his outward condition that had made his life bright; but philosophers have always known the worthlessness of external advantages. The highest good—which is not wealth, or office, or friendship, or popularity, or noble birth, or brilliant reputation—is still within the reach of Boethius, but this highest good can be none other than the Supreme Himself. Still, there is the fact, Boethius urges, that in this world the bad often do get on very well, while the good are cruelly wronged. And here Philosophy does not help him much, as she insists on the Stoic idea that the wise man is free. And then there follow discussions in which many interesting things are said about providence and faith, and about human free-will and Divine fore-knowledge. He suddenly breaks off at the fifth book at the point when the executioner enters the cell to end at the same moment the life and work of the illustrious author.

Undoubtedly the treatise on the *Consolation of Philosophy* insists that the world is ruled by God; but it carries us no further. It passes sin by, and deals with pain as the Stoics dealt with it—as something to be somehow ignored or overcome; it has little to say on the supreme mystery of death. It might have been written by one of the more respectable Deists of the last century, but, in fact, it was written by a Christian who, as we know from other sources, took a great interest in the questions that agitated the Christian Church 1300 years ago, who must have had in his hands the holy Gospels, the Epistles of St. Paul, the writings in which the great Augustine had shown to the world the full meaning and power of the inspired record. How is it that Boethius, in the solitary weeks and months which closed his earthly career, could fall back upon what heathendom had to give? Why is there no mention of the Cross with its atoning virtue for human sin, with its sanctifying power for human pain, with its sustaining consolations for the last agony? Was it that, in the secret soul of Boethius, Plato and Proclus had a throne as high as, or even higher than, that which he assigned to our Lord Jesus Christ? Was it that he could not free himself from the academic or literary prejudice which often cannot reconcile the preaching of the Cross with the dainty tests and requirements of literature? We do not know; but, whatever be the explanation, it is impossible to escape from a feeling of sadness at the spectacle of so beautiful a soul surrounded by such rich opportunities, yet so tragically missing them. Boethius remains a typical specimen of those minds of Christendom for whom Christ has not made their deepest darkness to be light.[1]

Our Lord and Saviour, by appearing among us, has taught us what God is; He has taught us what man is, and what man through Himself may be. He has also lighted up the darker mysteries of our human life with knowledge and hope such as, but for Him, we could never have enjoyed, so that we may repeat the words with a conviction of their truth more

[1] H. P. Liddon.

intimate and more robust than the Psalmist ever could feel: 'The Lord my God will enlighten my darkness.' For there are three dark shadows that fall across every human life—the shadow of sin, the shadow of pain, and the shadow of death.

1. There is, first of all, *the shadow of sin.* Sin is the transgression in will or in fact of the eternal moral law, that law which, unlike the law of Nature, could not be other than what it is, unless God could be other than what He is; that law which is not the arbitrary enactment of His will, but the outflow and expression of His very being. Sin itself is the contradiction of God; it is the repudiation of God, the perverse activity of the created will, which would fain, if it could, violate God. Only when we thus contemplate the true nature of sin do we feel that the language of the Bible about it is not exaggerated and that there is justice in the stern sentence—'The soul that sinneth, it shall die.' Not that sin as the Bible represents it is always an act. Often it is a state, an attitude of the will, an atmosphere of mind and disposition. It pervades thought, it insinuates itself into the springs of resolve, it presides over life where there is no conscious or deliberate intention of welcoming it. It changes its form again and again; at one time it is anger, at another envy, at another sloth, at another outrageous self-assertion, at another degraded imagination. But throughout it is one in its root and principle—the resistance of the created will to the will of the Creator. And this resistance means darkness in the moral nature, darkness in the moral intelligence, darkness at the centre of the soul; and, as He who knew indeed what we are has said, 'If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness.'

The shadow of sin cannot be conjured away; and, sinners as we are, we can only cry out in words well known to us: 'Lighten our darkness, we beseech Thee, O Lord, and by Thy great mercy defend us from sin this night, for the love of Thy only Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.' Has not this prayer been answered: 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world'? Upon us, sitting as we are in the darkness of the region of the shadow of death, there shines the sun of His pardoning love, and He, our Lord and God, in very deed makes our darkness to be light.

¶ William Jay saw John Newton just at the end of his life. The mind and tongue of the old preacher were past their business: 'My memory is nearly gone,' he murmured, 'but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Saviour.'[1]

2. There is another shadow following hard upon the shadow of sin as being not seldom its consequence—*the shadow of pain.* What pain is in itself is a question that cannot really be answered. We know it by its presence, by its effects. There may be persons without experience of any but the sunny side of life, for whom the pain that is suffered daily, hourly, momentarily in this our world has no meaning; but for others, and a large number, the problem of pain is a distressing, even an overwhelming one, which they cannot put away from them. Pain dogs our steps from the cradle to the grave; it is the monopoly of no class; the infant and the old man, the stupid and the intellectual, the wealthy and the poor, the good and the bad—all have their share in this inheritance.

Pain, in the world of Nature, often warns against that which endangers life; but the Lord of life needed no such warning, and yet He was a sufferer. Pain in the world of men is often the consequence of wrong-doing; but our Lord did 'no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth,' and yet He was a sufferer—nay, He was the greatest sufferer that the world ever saw. Man suffers more than the animals, the higher races of men suffer more than the lower. With such a bodily frame as His, with such a human soul as His, our Lord must have possessed a capacity for pain of which our relatively coarse and dull natures can form no adequate conception; and so the prophet saw Him across the centuries as having a visage 'marred more than any man, and

[1] D. Crawford, *Back to the Long Grass*, 174.

his form more than the sons of men.' As the Man of Sorrows our Lord showed that pain is not to be measured by the reasons for it which we can trace in Nature; it has more and larger purposes, which we can only guess at. But as associated with resignation, love, sanctity, pain is most assuredly the harbinger of peace and joy. On the Cross its triumph was unique; it availed to take away the sin of the world. On the Cross we read two mottoes which transfigure the realm of pain: 'By whose stripes we are healed,' and 'If we suffer, we shall also reign with him.'

¶ Pain seemed to me now a greater mystery than ever before. But I comforted myself with the thought that in the highest Life ever seen on earth, there was a full measure of spiritual, mental, and physical pain. Also it was a comfort to feel that when one accepted, not simply with resignation, but with faith, certain suffering, one was in sympathy with the will of the universe, 'working together with God' in some mysterious way.[1]

3. There is *the shadow of death*—death which is ever round us, death which, sooner or later, comes to us all. The thought that death must come at last casts over thousands of lives a deep gloom. There is the uncertainty of the time and manner of its approach; there is the unimaginable experience of what in itself it will be; there is the dread of man as to what may, or may not, follow it. No real comfort is to be had by reflecting that the laws of Nature are irresistible. We sometimes witness the utter misery which is caused by the visit of death to a family made up of people of warm affectionate characters who have parted with Christian faith. Death lays his hand on a son or a daughter, and then all these questions are asked by the aching hearts, and no mere human speculation can really answer them: What has become of him? Does he still exist, or was it the last moment of existence? Can we hope to see him more, or is all really over, as really as though he had never been?

[1] F. Robinson, *Letters to His Friends.*

Only one prayer will help these sufferers: 'Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord, for the love of Thine only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.' The darkness of the grave is not less lightened by our Lord and Saviour than is the darkness of sin or the darkness of pain. He has entered the sphere of death, and with Christians death is no longer dark. Through death Christ our Lord overcame him that had the power of death—that is, the devil—and delivered them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage; the lamp of His dying love is our light through the gloom.

Hereby thou comest at last unto thine own,
The Heaven of Heaven!
Self-wittingly at one
With Him who hath the Universe for throne,
Who wieldeth the stars seven;
Who only is
The Mystery of Mysteries
Ineffable, My Son,
My sole-begotten ere the worlds began,
Made manifest as Man.

And the grim Nothingness thou namest Death,
With all his shadowy peers—
Angers, and lusts, and fears—
The which so long against thy peace did plot,
Shall be remembered not,
Or, shrivelling at a breath,
Be known as naught;
Yea, that they never were
Save in the realm of things that but appear,
Creations of thine unillumined thought.[1]

Illumination.

Ps. xviii. 28.—'Thou wilt light my candle.'

We might perhaps be tempted to take this as meaning simply, 'Thou wilt preserve my life,' that is, keep my light burning even amid the wild blasts of adversity: a sentiment not unnatural in a Psalm expressing gratitude for deliverance out of many troubles and dangers. But the second line, which, as often in the couplets of Hebrew poetry, is explanatory of

[1] J. Rhoades.

the first, makes the matter plain: 'The Lord my God will *enlighten my darkness.*' Clearly it is enlightenment that is meant, and not merely preservation.

The compiler of the Second Book of Samuel incorporates this magnificent ode in his history as David's Song of Victory. But whether it be David's or another's, it is clearly—as Dr. Moulton says—'not the celebration of a particular victory, but a thanksgiving for the victorious mercies of a lifetime.' He has been in tight places, this man. He has passed through many crises, to describe which he dips his poet pen in the lightning and the storm. It seems to him now in the restrospect as if the very stars in their courses had fought for him, as if God had bowed the heavens and come down. And to the casual reader of the Psalm it savours somewhat of anti-climax to say, after all that, 'The Lord will light my candle.' A meagre result this, surely, of dread experiences and striking providences! A small reward to be the crown and guerdon of a lifetime of striving!

But when you come to think of it, what else is all the hurly-burly for? What does it profit a man to have lived through great experiences, if they light no candle in his mind; if he has learned nothing by them; if he is no wiser; if things are no clearer to him than before? Whenever you begin really to think of life, of this world with all its dread machinery of sin and sorrow, you realize that there is no real recompense save that the harvest of it all should be garnered in living souls who are thereby advanced some little way on the road to wisdom. The Psalmist is right. Experience which lights no candle in the soul is barren and fruitless. The toil and travail of history are in vain unless they bring illumination, make the meaning of life a little plainer, reveal the path in which it were wisdom for human feet to tread.

It is so in the broad field of history, and it is so in the individual life. There is no reward comparable to this—there is, in truth, no other reward—that through our experience of life, our falls and uprisings, our joys and sorrows, our pleasures and pains—all the play of God's hand upon us, His mercies and His judgments—we should come at last to what John Masefield calls 'the glory of the lighted mind'; that the story of our own hearts, the meaning of life, should glow with sudden light and the fact of God stand out, because the true self within us is at length awake; because the smoking wick has caught fire at last, and before its clear and steady flame the darkling shadows flee.

1. The Psalmist had come through deep waters. He had been in the hurricane of fire. In the hour of his extremity he had cried, as he tells us, to God. And wonderfully had he been helped. It was as if the tread of God hastening to his relief had shaken Nature to its foundations, as if earthquake and storm had been his allies, and in the lightning God had unloosed for Him His own 'terrible swift sword.' So the poet's imagination, his grateful and adoring heart, looked back and read the mystery and miracle of his deliverance.

Yet it was no mere miracle, no mere 'interference of the gods,' the Psalmist chronicled. It was only that he had worked out his own salvation with awe and reverence, seeing that it was God who worked through his instrumentality to do what seemed good to Him. In the hour of need, resources of unsuspected strength had been discovered. 'For by thee have I run through a troop; by my God have I leaped over a wall.' 'He maketh my feet like hinds' feet.' 'He teacheth my hands to war; so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms.' The Psalmist sees God in these things, and he sees them in God. He traces all deeds of noble daring to their fountain-head. He sums it all up in this: 'He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them which hated me: for they were too strong for me.' 'Thy right hand hath holden me up,' he cries, adding—and here his face grows soft and tender with some gracious memory—'and thy gentleness hath made me great,' as if he had a heart-melting vision of himself and all men existing only under 'the covert of God's patience.'

2. But let us pause here a moment to reflect on a difference between the Psalmist's experience and our own. For difference there is, and a reason for the difference. He pleads for the lit candle, the mental illumination, the deep heart experience that shall touch his spirit as with God's own flame and dispel the darkness from the face of the world. Not even in the hour of his deepest danger had he known the experience. And not even yet has it come to him, as with reverence and gratitude he passes in review the happenings of those tragic years. The shadow still lies darkly on so many things; the riddle of human existence is so hard to read. He is reaching for something still out of sight, believing that in his heart there is the prophecy of its coming: that somewhere, somehow it *will* come. Shall we not dare to say that he was really looking for Christ, 'the light'—as old Simeon said when he took Mary's child in his arms—'to lighten the nations, and to be the glory of his people Israel'? Christ, the light of the world, who has lit so many candles, who has banished the darkness from so many lives, who has touched so many spirits with holy fire.

3. All down the centuries Christ has touched many souls with sacred fire, and the golden deeds that have brightened the face of the world have gathered ever round these centres of living flame. But the consequences have hitherto been neither so widespread, so far-reaching or so abiding as the need of the world demands. Is it to be so still? Is Christ, the one true light, the giver of the sacred fire, still outwith the strategic centres of the world's energy? Do we see Him standing to-day as He has stood in the long centuries that lie behind, the one true light in the darkness of a world that *seems to be going any way but His?* A world that has not learned the meaning of its own experiences or recognized the day of its visitation.

It looks sometimes as if, indeed, it were so. And yet I am persuaded it is not so really. Not nearly so much as things we read in newspapers would lead us to think. In ordinary times, in the days before the war, for example, a stranger from Mars would have gathered from our news-sheets the impression that the population of these isles was engaged chiefly in theft, fraud and housebreaking. But it was not really so. The great bulk of us were home-loving, law-abiding, law-respecting people. And the same optical illusion and false perspective is given to-day. True, we have a long way to go, our statesmen have a long way to go, and those who represent various interests within the nation, which in the deep heart of them are not really conflicting, but seem for the moment to be so. There are many things in contemporary happenings not from above but from below. And yet one has reason very often to be humbly proud of much in the national spirit and temper to-day. We should gladly see more signs everywhere that men were learning wisdom from the trials and testings of past years. But who shall say that no candles are lit and still burning brightly, that the Spirit of Christ is not moving among men, that there is less and not more reason for the faith of John that the Christ he knew and loved had a cosmic significance, was built, as it were, into the very structure of things, and that He is light for all men that come into the world even when they do not quite know it?[1]

Buoyancy.

Ps. xviii. 33.—'He maketh my feet like hinds' feet, and setteth me upon my high places.'

This magnificent Psalm, one of the finest in the whole collection of the sacred songs of ancient Israel, strikes a strongly personal note. It is an interesting fact that some of the very best of Old Testament scholars do not hesitate to ascribe the Psalm to King David himself, as its title does. It fits in with the events of David's life very accurately. It is a wonderful poem, full of spiritual fervour and devotion, and abounding in rich and daring metaphors, some of them of exceeding beauty and grandeur. These alone

[1] C. Allan, *The New World*, 47ff.

would make it a delight to read, even if there were nothing else to commend it. But there is a great deal more. The spiritual insight and lofty feeling it displays have made it a classic of Christian worship. And in this connection there is no more exquisite and nobly suggestive figure of speech within it than this: 'He maketh my feet like hinds' feet, and setteth me upon my high places.'

We think of Wordsworth's lines, in which he describes a natural lady, made by Nature herself:

> She shall be sportive as the fawn
> That wild with glee across the lawn
> Or up the mountain springs.

And it is this buoyancy, this elasticity, this springiness that the Lord is waiting to impart to the souls of His children, so that they may move along the ways of life with the light steps of the fawn.

1. Do you grasp the significance of the allusion? Hinds' feet are of marvellous swiftness and made to carry their owner over difficult places practically impassable to slower-footed creatures. The idea in the singer's mind is that of a Divine enduement of human weakness, a supplying of ability and confidence to the soul whereby it springs up out of danger which assails it on the lower levels of life, and climbs lightly and easily to the spiritual uplands.

¶ I do not exactly know what animal furnishes this illustration in Palestine, but I once saw in Colorado this very thing here described. Travelling with a small party of friends amongst the mountains there, we came to a rugged defile which presently opened into a narrow glade in which a herd of antelopes—or what I took to be antelopes—was grazing. If I remember rightly, another party coming in the opposite direction rounded the far corner of the defile at about the same moment, so that the deer were caught, as it were, between two forces. We did not intend to do them any harm, but should greatly have liked a closer look at them. That, however, we did not get. The instant they caught sight of us they leaped up the side of the cliff to our right hand at an almost incredible rate of speed, following each other gracefully and apparently without effort from point to point in the giddy ascent, making scarcely a sound as they went, till they were finally lost to view amid the towering rocks and trees far above our heads. It was all over in a minute or two, and we were filled with admiration as we watched the rapidly moving feet of the pretty little creatures springing from crag to crag. It could hardly be called climbing; they were not pulling themselves up; they simply jumped and stood wherever they liked, in perfect poise, and without the slightest hesitation. No fear of their way being blocked; they could go where a man could not except with the utmost caution and at considerable risk to his own safety. They were absolutely secure, and they knew it. Up they fled and were gone.

It is quite clear that King David, or whoever wrote those words, had witnessed some scene of this kind with much the same interest as we in Colorado nearly three thousand years later. And how felicitous the use he makes of it! 'Thou makest my feet like hinds' feet'—the grace of God in the believing soul imparts to it a lightsomeness, a spiritual sure-footedness, if I may so put it, a facility and confidence, whereby it is able to escape from any menace and find its way to heights where no evil can reach to harm or destroy. 'He setteth me upon my high places.'[1]

2. Some of us move with very heavy feet. There is little of the fawn about us as we go along the road. There is reluctance in our obedience. There is a frown in our homage. Our benevolence is graceless, and there is no charm in our piety and no rapture in our praise. We are the victims of 'the spirit of heaviness.' And yet here is the word which tells that God will make our feet 'like hinds' feet.' He will give us exhilaration and spring, enabling us to leap over difficulties and have strength and buoyancy for the steepest hills.

[1] J. H. Jowett, in *The British Congregationalist*, July 16, 1914.

¶ Bishop Moule has spoken somewhere of 'the buoyancy of the believing spirit.' Think of the picture. A buoy is fastened securely to a rock at the bottom of the sea. The waves splash around it; it floats serenely in its appointed place. The tide rises and falls; it is still there. The Atlantic rollers come racing towards it; it mounts them one by one and rides upon them as they roll past. The tempest descends, the billows rush upon the little buoy, and for a moment it is submerged. But immediately it rises to the surface and is in its place again, unmoved and unharmed.

What a picture of the conquering life! What a power and a privilege for a soul to be able thus to rise lightly above every opponent, every vexation! Never to sink into discontentment; never to be overwhelmed with fear or doubt; *always to be on the top* of the fretful sea of life![1]

Gentleness and Greatness.

Ps. xviii. 35.—'Thy gentleness hath made me great.'

'THE gentleness of God?' What does it mean? What reality does it express in terms of our own experience? Gentleness is a word much misunderstood and not infrequently caricatured. There are some soft and tender natures that seem without fire; they move among men with quiet speech and unobtrusive ways, and while there is a certain sense in which we value them, we often wish that they would reveal traces of passion. It is not through the medium of such natures that we can look at this phrase. They give us no index and clue to its truth.

For the real meaning of gentleness we must see it against a background of strength. The *gentle*man, for example, is not the mere creature of conventional manners who often passes muster as such. The real idea of the gentleman is one who, with a personality of power, does not obtrude himself upon his fellows, but with restraint and understanding and a certain delicacy of feeling, treats other men as he would be treated himself. Manners in that noble sense are an expression of character, and you will find that they are most evident in the strongest men.

The blustering, overbearing type of nature is not strong, it advertises its weakness. Strength restrains itself in patience—is quiet in its methods—and throws around others the protecting cloak of its own gentleness. There are living illustrations of that great blending of qualities—men of wisdom who are marvellously patient with slowness of apprehension, men of power who have a great store of tenderness for the weak things. They are the real *gentle*men of this world. The gentleness of the weak and the gentleness of the strong are two entirely different things.

¶ Mr. Cobden came to Leicester during my early school days, and the theatre was packed by a crowd to whom the arguments for Free Trade were unfamiliar and therefore repugnant. I accompanied my father to the stage, and occupied a stool almost at Mr. Cobden's feet. The tact and patience he displayed in facing the storm of interruption by which he was assailed captivated the authors of the turbulence, and he concluded a speech of an hour and a half amidst an ovation of applause. A less adroit speaker from Ireland succeeded him, and roused the people to fury by his truculent attacks. I became alarmed at the aspect of the surging crowd, and Mr. Cobden, turning round, and seeing a frightened child beside him, drew me on to his knee, and converted me to Free Trade principles by his gentle reassurance.[1]

1. Let us carry the thought up to God. Is He not gentle with all the gentleness of strength? If there is a certain truth of life at all, it is that men and women are not bullied or threatened or forced in any way into obedience. Human personality is everywhere respected; there is a wonderful delicacy of dealing in which freedom is not infringed. Sometimes, indeed, men have mistaken the meaning of this fact of life and have complained that God does not assert Himself

[1] J. A. Clapperton, *Culture of the Christian Heart*, 100.

[1] A. Mursell, *Memories of My Life*, 23.

and His power more obviously. They have sometimes mistaken gentleness for indifference and rebelled against a God who hides Himself. Men use their power in tyrannical fashion, with slight regard to the freedom or right of their fellows, but God veils His Power, and even though His children rebel against Him He does not crush them with a strong hand. If God used His Power as men are often advised to use theirs, there would be no world at all; it would have been blotted out long ago. Certain schools of religion are always expecting this to happen, and talk with strange insistence about a coming day when God will display His Power to the discomfiture of evil-doers. But that day does not come.

Why does it not come? Because of the Divine gentleness. His Will is to save, not to destroy. He bears with men. The Highest is the Most Patient. 'The long suffering of the Lord is our salvation.' Have you never wondered how it is that God has borne with you so long, what use He can have for a creature who so easily accepts the gifts and forgets the Giver? No man who looks deeply into his own life can fail to feel that wonder. Power is all around us, power which might at any time leap out to arrest us on our heedless way, but that power is veiled in gentleness.

This picture shines before our eyes in the supreme revelation of God in Christ. 'The bruised reed he will not break, the dimly burning wick he will not quench.' That was true of all His dealings. 'Strong Son of God,' we call Him, and the title fits Him—for His strength stood every test that the world can impose—and yet at the same time He is the gentle Jesus of our childhood's prayers. How delicate was His approach to the soul's inmost need! How sensitive He was to its shame and guilt! Christ never jarred the feelings of those whom we should say did not deserve to have their feelings respected. He moved among men with a certain delicate reverence for human nature. Beside that picture of God's gentleness in Christ, all the lurid pictures of God's ruthlessness, of His fierceness, seem poor, and mean, and tawdry.

2. How does the Divine gentleness become the secret of human greatness? The connection is not a hard one to realize, because there are so many illustrations of the truth on the lower plane of human relationships. The child grows great by the gentleness of its parents. If they were harshly to impose their will the ultimate result would be that the child would become either a creature moving in obedience to commands or else a rebel, most probably the latter. It is from the gentleness of life that all possibilities of greatness spring.

So, too, in the inward relationships of life, in love and friendship of all kinds. Is it not true to what you know to say that the greatest lessons you have ever had in life's beauty and meaning have come to you along the lines of forbearance? In every life there is some love which takes us nearest to the Divine just because it has not dealt with us according to our blundering and waywardness, but has believed the best of us when the harsh verdict was easiest to pass. In this life of ours, so strange and wonderful, it is the delicate, quiet influences which count for most. These are the things which put courage and strength and joy into the hearts of men.

Now transfer all this to the Divine dealings with us. Round about our lives there is the Divine patience and long-suffering. God does not use His power in harsh ways. He is the great Educator in this respect, that He allows our minds to grow, learning as they do through many mistakes and blunders. 'He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities,' wrote the Psalmist in the days of long ago, and his word is as true to-day as it was then. There is a royal clemency about all God's ways. It is in the restraint of God's power that man grows.

3. There are two great applications of this truth.

(1) The first belongs to all our human relationships. We are vested with our little range of power in the home and in the ways of business life. Let us be careful how we use the power which is given us. Use it in

harsh, unfeeling ways and there is no swifter road to the soul's corruption. Make someone's life harder because you have power over that life, play the tyrant at home, or in the shop or warehouse, and, as certain as you live, the account will have to be squared in the presence of the Divine power. Christ taught that in unmistakable fashion. The hard man will taste life's hard edge himself. The measure that he metes will be measured out to him again.

The misuse of power is one of the greatest sins in the sight of God; and how common it is! The more one sees of life the more one finds of people's lives being made miserable, and often unbearable, because of the spirit of those who are over them in power. The meanness of it is incredible at times. In the name of Christ it is flagrant sin. Worse than the sins of the gutter are these sins of position and power. Think of the miseries of resentment and envy and jealousy working their way, poisoning all the finer springs of nature! Think of the suppressed hostilities among classes and nations, either making men cruel in the day of their power, or longing for power in order that they may pay back cruelty for cruelty!

This is one of the sins of mankind which exacts the heaviest toll of suffering. Let us purge our hearts of any traces of it. If you have any power over your fellows anywhere, resolve here and now in the presence of God to use it in gentleness. Let there be no malice and no meanness. Dedicate yourself to the broad generous ways. In the sight of God the decision to do that may well mark a turning point in your spiritual life, for there is nothing which so completely hides God and shuts Him off as any poison working in your relationship with your fellows.

(2) The second application of the truth concerns our view of God. It is true enough that the gentleness of God gives us our chance of greatness. But do not let the gentleness of God blind us. So many men and women live in the sphere of God's gentleness and their hearts make no response to Him at all. They are heedless of God. The springs of worship are dried up in their hearts. They live as though God did not exist. Their folly consists in this. If God were less and lower than He is they would attend to His claims. They would come to heel at the crack of the whip. They would listen to the arguments of power. But to the claims of love they have no ear.

So it has come to pass that, in the world of to-day, there are multitudes of men and women who never think of worship, and whose souls have lost all the wonder of adoration and reverence. Good men and women many of them are, as the world reckons goodness, but stunted on one side of their nature. To power they would listen. To gentleness they are deaf.

In a world where the gentleness of God is the ruling spirit, keep the heart attuned to the quiet voices and influences of the spirit. Make room, make more room, for worship. Do not miss God because His voice is quiet and His ways gentle. Look for Him, not in the winds or the earthquakes of life, but in the still small voices. Do not allow that side of life to be lost in the pressure of work and pleasure. 'Thy gentleness hath made me great.' Yes! It is the one secret of any greatness we may attain to.[1]

God's Gentleness.

Ps. xviii. 35.—'Thy gentleness hath made me great.'

THE gentleness of God. What a conception is here! Which of all the religions of the ancient world, outside the Hebrew, can produce such a thought of God? Add to this the thought of man's greatness as the outcome of God's gentleness, and you will search in vain for its equal among the systems of the old-world time. It sounds more like a saying of John the Beloved, who leaned upon the bosom of Christ and heard how His heart beat in love for the world, than of David, who lived in rude and barbarous times. It resembles more the spirit of the gospel age, when the heavenly choristers declared the new-born

[1] S. M. Berry, *Revealing Light*, 197ff.

Saviour as the Prince of peace, than that of the time when God was said to be a man of war, taking vengeance on His enemies, and ordering the slaughter of masses of men. It is more like the teaching of Jesus, the Son of God, than of David the King, who fought his way to the throne of Israel.

The word 'gentleness' here is an inclusive term. It takes in a variety of excellences—such as tenderness, considerateness, kindness, condescension. Some have translated the word 'Thy goodness.' David, in taking a retrospect of the past, acknowledged that it was owing to the Divine goodness he was great, and not because of any goodness of his own. He felt, as he remembered what he had been—a lowly shepherd boy, of rustic simplicity—that all the greatness which was attached to his present exalted position as King over Israel was due to the favour of God. Not by any native valour, or strength, or wisdom had he gained his high position, but by the gentleness of the Divine treatment—the continued kindly action which, seen in the many details of his eventful life, had surprised and overwhelmed him. The idea of lowliness enters into the meaning of the word 'gentleness'—is essential to it. 'Gentleness' is contrasted with 'greatness.' There is, first, God stooping down to that which is lowly, and as the result of His condescension there is the gentle, tender rule of His loving administration. It is as though the Psalmist had said, 'If Jehovah had manifested to me His greatness without condescension I should have been stricken to the earth, crushed as a worm under the foot of power; but since He has appeared unto me in the kinder aspects of fatherly love, I, who am but little, have been made great, and my nature has become ennobled.'

1. How is it that the gentleness of God makes us great? The human heart is always more deeply affected by tenderness than by sternness. If you want to reform a criminal, you will succeed best by adopting the method of gentleness. If you are unbending he will remain unbent; but if you are full of kindness, even while you feel that his crime cannot go unpunished, your tenderness will produce a marked result. If you wish to drag a man by force, his nature is to resist you; but if you attempt to attract him by love, it is equally in his nature to follow you. Now God who has given us this nature, seeks to save us in accordance with it. We are lying under sentence of condemnation, and He sends to us a message of deliverance willingly wrought for us through the death of His own Son. He proclaims, through the Cross of Christ, salvation to all who will receive it. But what gentleness is here? God was under no obligation to save men unless He had so chosen. No injustice would have been inflicted on any one if no salvation had been provided, and we had been left to the consequences of our sin. But then, whatever else this leaving of sinners to themselves would have done, it never could have made men great; and so, not wishing that human greatness should disappear from His universe, God has manifested His gentleness in the mission and work of Jesus Christ, and makes proclamation of pardon and regeneration to everyone who will accept them through His Son. It is this that changes the disposition of the heart toward God. The thunders of Sinai do but terrify; the manifestation of love attracts. 'Law and terrors do but harden'; this melts the soul. God's gentleness produces in me that love to Him which is the source and inspiration of holiness.

This heart hath walls that anger never shook;
But love shall break and take it with a look.[1]

2. We seem to see more clearly the gentleness that is in God as we watch the manner of Jesus and His relations with people. Let us take two characteristic instances. Towards the close of His ministry Jesus and His disciples were approaching a Samaritan village, and He sent His messengers on before to prepare a lodging and to make other arrangements. But these messengers were met with a harsh and summary refusal. The villagers came out, and made it quite clear that they did not want

[1] F. Langbridge, *Little Tapers*, 24.

Christ and His disciples to come to them and would not have Him. Such was their behaviour that James and John would have called down fire from heaven to consume these unmannerly churls. But we read: 'Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they went to another village.' Without surprise, complaint, delay or argument He accepted the message of rejection. He would not force the issue now, He would wait, He would give them time. He 'went to another village.'

Or take the other case, the sad history of a woman who was arrested for wrongdoing, 'taken in the manner,' brought to Jesus and accused. And Jesus wrote with His finger on the ground. Her accusers were so sure of their case that they pressed their questions again, and He said: 'He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone'; and again He stooped and wrote on the ground. And they went out and Jesus said to the woman: 'Doth no man condemn thee? Neither do I. Go thy way and sin no more.' Now we know that that is no mere leniency, we know it is the method, the chosen method, of One who would set no bounds to what He would do to save that poor bedraggled soul; and we believe that she went away bound for ever to that gentleman of God, and in after days, when she had recovered her virginity, she could say: 'Thy gentleness has made me pure.'

How different it is from the usual treatment people mete out to each other! Have you never felt weary with the amount of upbraiding and reproach that there is in life? Sometimes the air is thick with blame. Much of it is due to sheer Pharisaism, much of it is an indirect kind of cowardly self-defence, and much of it is thoughtless bad temper. But nothing good can flourish in that polluted atmosphere of constant recrimination. It depresses life and sterilizes aspiration. It makes moral restoration almost impossible; no sick soul has ever recovered in the atmosphere of blame. Every healing ministry has avoided reproaches. It is said that mental specialists never blame a patient, however self-caused may be his trouble; and a hospital chaplain talking about the medical staff in one of our great hospitals, said: 'There's one thing I like especially about these men, they never blame their patients, they take the facts as they are and use all their skill in the confident hope of curing them.' And in that there is something which corresponds to the method of Jesus in His healing ministry to the soul. His restraint, His kindness of reserve, His profound respect for the privacy of personality, His refusal to force Himself or impose Himself until a man is ready, that is His characteristic method.

He goes to another village in order to give us time. And the longer the time we take, the longer must Christ feel the bitterness of His rejection. The feelings which we relieve in blame He bears in His silent spirit. Biding our time He still bears our sins. He waits, but waits on a cross! It is very strange. One wonders whether this method will succeed. To us there appears the great risk that it will not, and yet it is His method! And certainly there have been those with whom it has succeeded, and they have come back unforced, with a contrition and a repentance which would never have been theirs under any other treatment. Men like Luther and Augustine and Francis were saved by this treatment. God's gentleness made them great.

They Cried.

Ps. xviii. 41.—'They cried, but there was none to save them: even unto the Lord, but he answered them not.'

Ps. xxii. 24.—'For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him he heard.'

A TRAGIC interest attaches to the former of these two sharply contrasted passages from the fact that it was found underlined in blood in a Bible belonging to one of the victims of the massacre at Cawnpore during the Indian Mutiny of 1857. We can but feebly imagine the state of mind of the poor defenceless woman who thus emphasized these almost terrible words. After many days of frightful suffering and horror, two hundred British

women and children were, you remember, barbarously murdered in the single room where they were all confined. It is not often realized by those who refer to this incident that the actual massacre had been preceded by a succession of events of the most harrowing description. First there was the siege of the tiny British garrison in the open plain, with no defences except a few mud entrenchments, the sun beating pitilessly down upon the heads of the shelterless company. No water was to be had, and very little food. Some of the besieged lost their reason, and many, especially of the younger children, died. One of the most pitiful things about this dreadful experience, says a correspondent, was that after the first day the children stopped crying; they had got beyond it. Then came the surrender upon Nana Sahib's deceitful promise that the lives of all the survivors would be spared and boats furnished to take them down the river to join the main British forces. The promise was deliberately broken, the crowded boats set on fire, and the wretched people on board shot down from the banks as they attempted to escape. All the men who reached the shore alive were instantly put to death by the orders of Nana Sahib, the sentence in most cases being carried out in the very presence of their wives and little ones, who had to be torn shrieking from their arms before the end came. A few days later, as already mentioned, the end came for these helpless bereaved ones too. They were butchered in cold blood by two or three brutal assassins who were sent into their prison for that purpose. Naturally the cruel deed took a long time, for there were many to kill, and we are told that the murderers actually stopped in the middle of their dreadful work and went away for a rest, locking the door behind them. Perhaps it was at that awful moment, in the midst of that shocking respite, that the words from the eighteenth Psalm were underlined in gore by one of the little band still left waiting for the sound of the returning feet of their cruel destroyers. This was the consummation of day after day of long drawn out agony, all through which, we may be sure, the most fervent appeals were ascending to Heaven for help and deliverance. How those mothers would beg for their children's lives! How they would cry to God to spare their husbands and fathers! Yet all was silence; there was no Divine interposition; right to the hellish finish went on the fearful tale; the only deliverance that came, and it was slow in coming, was the deliverance of death. Well might the sentence be marked in blood, 'They cried, but there was none to save: even unto the Lord, but he answered them not.' [1]

In the second text we have an express denial of indifference on the part of God towards human woe. 'For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard.' The whole atmosphere of this Psalm is very different from the earlier one; no doubt it is of much later date. It has been called a Passion Psalm, and as such has been associated in Christian usage with the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. It says not a word about the merit or demerit of the sufferer, but only about his sore extremity, and the comforting assurance of the statement in the text is that God does pity human sorrow; He does not consider it beneath His notice; nor does He turn His back upon anyone who seeks His help. He hears the cry of the afflicted—which in this case is the same thing as to say that He comes to the rescue. No prayer for deliverance in time of trouble goes unhonoured.

1. Here, then, are two contradictory sets of facts stated in two texts: 'They cried, but there was none to save,' and 'When the afflicted cried unto him, he heard.' One might think that the former of those two statements should kill the latter, but it does not. And why not? Because they are both true, but they are true in different ways. God's salvation often reaches the inner man by the destruction of the outer, and what seems most terrible to mortal sense, and the most utter negation of the love of God, is often God's method of freeing the sinful soul from the

[1] R. J. Campbell.

dross of the flesh and uniting it to Himself. Yes, He often comes to the deliverance of the aspiring soul by what looks like abandoning him to his fate. Jesus Himself cried when there was none to save, but when He cried the Father heard. His way to glory lay through blood and shame, but for the joy that was set before Him the price was worth the paying. It is in Jesus that the highest truth stands revealed in this as in other things. God did not spare Him; if He had done so He would have been no Christ for us to-day. God did not spare Him His hour of agony and seeming dereliction, but by means of this very fact He has exalted Him to be Prince and Saviour, and given Him the name that is above every name. It was by the Cross that Jesus mounted to His throne in the heart of mankind.

2. There is a mysterious but indisputable connection between suffering and spiritual gain. The saints have also known it, and our blessed Lord Himself, as we now see, submitted to the great law. All earthly suffering, deserved or undeserved, and from whatsoever source, has its equivalent in spiritual good. We cannot explain the awful tragedies God permits in human life. Humanity has been crucified throughout all ages, and you may be stretched upon your cross at this moment. Is it not true that the principal horror of the situation is to you the silence of God concerning it? You cry, but there is none to save—to all appearance none to care. Ah, but God has not despised or abhorred your affliction; neither has He hidden His face from you; when you cried unto Him, He heard. The only question is how He is going to deliver you, for deliver you He will when this trial has done its work and you have entered into the fellowship of the risen Christ. The worst part of every night of sorrow is that the watcher feels there will never be a dawn. That is always the heaviest part of a sorrow, and it is always a delusion. 'Sorrow endureth for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.' God is never a passive spectator of the woes of His children; He is within them; He is manifesting Himself through them; and the day will come when He and we shall rejoice together over what they have accomplished. Cling fast to His almighty hand; cast yourself in the darkness upon His beating heart; and when the morning breaks, and the shapes of anguish flee, it will be to show you the smile upon His face.

¶ Of Michael Fairless her biographer writes: In the groaning and travailing of creation she bore her part, but never alone; always God was there bearing his part and the part of every one. Across the whole world there lay for her the light of the glory of divine sacrifice. Not for her was any picture of a serene and far-away God without 'parts' or 'passions,' looking on at the world's pain; it was the glory of her God to share all pain. There was nothing, no weariness of hers or any man's, no suffering, even of the beasts, that was not his. And faith in God gave her also faith in suffering, in the value of a sacrifice to be accomplished, of a travail that should bring forth fruit to all eternity, of groaning that was the utterance of slaves working towards their manumission and the freedom of divine sons. 'Lo, how I loved thee!'[1]

Three Sources of Truth.

Ps. xix. 1.—'The heavens declare the glory of God.'

1. The Bible declares three sources of truth, each of which is bound up with human experience, and is confirmed by it.

(1) There is *a natural religion.* 'The heavens declare the glory of God.' God makes Himself known in the strength and beauty and order of the universe. He has written His revelation in the open sky. He has graven His testimony on the rocks. He has unfolded His beauty in the trees and the flowers. He has displayed His power in the thunder of Niagara, and given a hint of His ineffable purity in the eternal snows of untrodden peaks. He has made us aware of His mystery in the poetry of the horizon and in the 'awful rose of dawn.' Astronomer, geologist, botan-

[1] Michael Fairless, *Life and Writings*, 67.

ist, zoologist, chemist, each makes some contribution to our knowledge of God, for each is dealing with His handiwork; and we are acting the part of wise men when we try to make our faith more rich and real by studying God in the laws that govern the universe, by finding His glory in the star, His strength in the hills, His beauty in the field.

¶ Nature has an extraordinary fascination for Sadhu Sundar Sing. But he does not love Nature in the spirit of St. Francis, preaching to the swallows or singing his canticle to 'brother Sun.' Nor, again, has he that feeling of immanent Divinity which marks the nature-mysticism of a Wordsworth. The Sadhu's point of view is much nearer to the Hebrew. The Hebrew attitude is thus described by Dr. Sanday in an unpublished paper written just before his death: 'The Greeks studied nature for its own sake: they observed it for its own sake and they analysed it for its own sake. As their disciples, we do the same. But the Hebrew Prophets cared very little for these things. They were interested in nature, and have left behind them magnificent descriptions of nature: but that was not for the sake of a purely calm contemplation of nature in itself. They always had an ulterior object; they were always thinking of nature as the handiwork and expression of God. What they, the Hebrew prophets, were really bent upon was, as I said, the things of the spirit. And as many of these things could not, or could not readily, be expressed directly, they were glad to express them indirectly: and as nature is full of analogies between the things of the body or material things, and the things of the spirit, they were glad to make use of these analogies in their task of expounding these latter to the mind of their hearers. In other words, they used them not for their own sake but as symbols.'

'The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork.' The Sadhu loves Nature not so much because he feels God *in* Nature, but because God made Nature and Nature is to him an open book speaking in parables about the things of God. He loves the beauty, especially the snow-clad beauty of the Himalayas, but it is less for the sake of the beauty itself than because in those eternal solitudes it is easier to hold communion with God and to read the great truths, which are written, as he says, all over Nature in capital letters. Not only beautiful but also unattractive sights of Nature—barren stretches of sand, festering decay—discourse to him in parables of God. Hence the phrase he so often uses—the Book of Nature.

The saint or the genius ever fails to comprehend why other people cannot see what is so obvious to himself. So the Sadhu wonders why there are so few who habitually read the Book of Nature and derive from it the comfort and inspiration which he himself finds there. The fruits of his reading in that book are the illustrations and parables which make up the greater part of his teaching.

'To read other books you must master painfully the language in which those books are written, but this is not so with the Book of Nature. It is written in a language which is simple and intelligible to all.' 'Live with Christ, and the Book of Nature will be clear to you.' To the Sadhu it is rest as well as illumination. Asked what relaxation he had, living as he did a life of high tension, he said, 'Reading the pages of the Book of Nature.' The thought of crossing the English Channel on his way to Paris filled him with delight, for it would provide him with another opportunity to study Nature. He stood on the deck and gazed at the deep blue sea, joy beaming on his face.

He compares and contrasts the Bible and the Book of Nature.

'The Bible and the Book of Nature are both written in spiritual language by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit being the author of life, all Nature, instinct with life, is the work of the Holy Spirit, and the language in which it is written is spiritual language. Those who are born again have the Holy Spirit for their mother. So to them the language of the Bible and of Nature is their mother tongue, which they easily and naturally understand.' The difference, however, between the Bible and the Book of Nature is this: 'The message of the

Bible is simple, direct and straightforward, whereas the message of the Book of Nature has to be spelt out carefully letter by letter.'[1]

(2) There is also *a religion of history*. 'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.' That passage should be interpreted with large meaning, lest we find that we are binding God within the narrow limits of our minds. It refers primarily to the revelation of God made in the personality of Jesus, disclosing in His perfect manhood the meeting-place of the human and the Divine. In Him the treasures of God's heart are displayed to man, and through Him man is lifted up to God and the broken and imperfect purposes of man are restored, finding a reconciliation and a unity. In Him we see the historical embodiment of those spiritual principles and forces which are making man in the Divine image. But the Christ-Spirit was in the world working out the will of God long before the Christ appeared as an historical person. Wherever an unselfish love has warmed and inspired human hearts and found an outlet in human affairs, taking the form of endurance or kindness or sacrifice or self-surrender, the Spirit of Christ has been truly present. God does not leave Himself without witness in the world. A splendid heroism, a strong and striking goodness, a passionate purity, a burning enthusiasm for truth and right, are constantly appearing in the checkered history of mankind, often in utterly unexpected places and in most surprising circumstances. And by these we know that the Light of the world is battling with the shadows of error and sin and ignorance and superstition, shining forth in souls who rise to greet its glory.

> God, stooping, shows sufficient of his light
> For us i' the dark to rise by.

And wherever men and women have so risen they have been heralds of Him in whose face men beheld the glory of God, full of grace and truth. Our faith finds ample support in the historical manifestations of the Divine in human personalities and in the events of time. In every instance when a nation has taken a step forward, out of barbarism and superstition, out of lust and cruelty, out of greed and selfishness, out of ignorance and wrong, there has been a manifestation of God, a disclosure of Christ, a revelation of the Divine Spirit in historic fact.

(3) But there is a further disclosure of God in which we may find a rich and inspiriting satisfaction. 'The Spirit beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God.' This is a description of *personal religion*, the faith that finds embodiment and expression in individual believers. This is the point at which the separate soul comes into living contact and fellowship with God, sharing His life, growing into His likeness, becoming a channel by which truth may be communicated to others, developing an original experience in spiritual things, transmitting a vital force to the community and to the race. Here you find the secret of all those histories which have been as lights amid the world's darkness, of those beautiful and powerful personalities whose strong and gracious influence has brought hope and inspiration, gladness and energy, truth and life to multitudes. Here is the arena in which men have made practical trial of truths they have grasped, and given shape and plan to the ideals that have dawned in beauty in their minds. In the mysterious and awful solitude of individuality a man receives his vision and goes out into the rough world of daily life to test it by personal experiment. He tries its effects upon common duty, subjects it to the trial of suffering and sorrow, puts it to the proof of experience. If his vision be indeed of God it will bear any trial, and henceforth he submits to it a willing obedience. There is a mysticism which is mere sentimentality, but a man who has truly grasped Christ with his soul and through Him knows God in the depth of his own nature, realizing by an inward witness that he is a child of God—such a man has a faith that holds, a vision that imparts increasing power, an ideal that gives form and beauty to the actual. He is a mystic whose mysticism is not lost in cloudy sentiment but writes itself in

[1] B. H. Streeter and A. J. Appasamy, *The Sadhu*, 191ff.

practical conduct, and finds a witness to its truth in wholesome character and beneficent service.

2. These three sources of Divine knowledge —natural religion, historical religion, personal religion—are not to be thought of as three separate and independent sources; they are three manifestations of one source. They are a unity in variety—a variety in unity. In each of them there is a true knowledge of God, a real discovery or disclosure of truth. It is a mistake to set one over against another and to make invidious distinctions. It will be our wisdom to learn that God is in Nature and in History and in the Soul, and to derive truth from each, allowing each to suggest its own lessons and to find its own illustration and embodiment in practical life. St. Paul tells us that there is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; but he does not suggest that we should find three different types of worship corresponding to each.

But that is what men try to do in the case of these three disclosures of God. You have one kind of man adoring God in Nature, giving himself up to the study of her laws or to the suggestions of her poetry, setting aside the need of an historical revelation, and looking for no inward spiritual experiences to support his faith. So we find a man like Wordsworth deriving his message from the bosom of Nature, finding 'sermons in stones, books in the running brooks,' and life's chief good in thoughts inspired by the hills and the valleys, meadows and flowers, and the simplicities of daily love and duty; or a man like Richard Jefferies, wearing his heart out in the passionate quest of a God who should grant him fullness of power and completeness of satisfaction through the natural glories of the earth. You have another kind of man, who finds content and strength through resting in historical certainties, but who is often inclined to deprecate Nature as pagan; or at least he declares her teachings insufficient, and he believes experience to be a rickety support for faith and the inner light to be a will-o'-the-wisp. This man is generally dogmatic and exclusive, and has scant tolerance for the Nature-worshipper or for the mystic. You have a third kind of man, who finds all he needs in the human soul, who makes conscience his seat of religious authority, who lays all the emphasis on intuition, who glories in the inner light and vision, and who deems himself emancipated from all external proof or evidence or suggestion, independent of Nature and History alike. But why should we thus make three tabernacles, one for the Mystic, one for the Historical Dogmatist, and one for the Worshipper of Nature? The God who discloses Himself in the heavens and in history and in the soul is not three Gods, but one, and one revelation is incomplete without another. The glories of sun, moon, and stars are each and all glories of light; and the unfoldings of Nature, History, and the Soul are each and all unfoldings of God.

They all find a place in the mind of Jesus Christ. No one ever had a keener eye for the beauty of Nature than He; no one ever had a richer confidence that God was working in human affairs, writing His truth in the bible of events, unfolding Himself in the signs of the times; no one ever had a deeper reverence for the human soul, or beheld more clearly the light of God shining in its depths, or strove more urgently to create the sense of personal relationship to the Divine Father. It is true that one vision of truth may be clearer and dearer to our heart than another, but that does not justify us in doubting the reality of the truth that comes to other men in a different way from ours, or in doubting the sincerity of those who hold it. Truth has many avenues to the soul, and the wise way is to accept with gratitude whatever power comes down from the Father of lights, confident that it will lead us back to the heart of Him who gave it.[1]

Some hearts know one sole language, every heart
A different language, but God knows them all,

[1] W. A. Mursell.

And if we make no answer to His call
In the great tongues authentic, quite apart
He will o'ertake us, and will speak a word
In that quaint dialect our childhood heard,
Yea, in our household language fond and small.

One heart shall hear Him if a bright-eyed bird
Run o'er the shadows, or a wayside stone
Be cupped and silver-fretted with its own
Quaint broidure; and another shall be stirred
Under the skies of grey November-tide
When to our earth, from some poor star that died,
Comes the last tender message long-deferred.

And one shall feel strong music lift him high,
And storm the gates of Heaven, and cast him in,
Under the gentle Feet that trode on sin;
And one among earth's bones and relics dry
Shall find the Life: and from a baby's hand
Shut on his finger, one shall understand
All knowledge, clasped in Love's immensity.[1]

Day unto Day.

Ps. xix. 2.—'Day unto day uttereth speech.'

That orderly succession, that unerring regularity with which through countless millions of years the world rolls round into shadow, and still back again into the light—is there no word in all this of anything higher than mechanical exactness? Would you find more suggestion of the Divine if there should come some sudden stop, a reversal of the movement? That has been, indeed, the common feeling: that is why people have so clung to the belief that once in the old Hebrew times the sun stood still. In reality that idea of the sun actually stopping, was probably the literalizing of a couple of lines of a very ancient war-song imbedded in the old Hebrew traditions. The cry of a warrior-chief in the crisis of his people's struggle for existence, his appeal in glittering oriental speech to the sun and moon not to go down until he fought that great fight through—such was perhaps the foundation of the belief. And well for us to feel that significance of the long world-order. We feel it in smaller things, when we notice them. We do not feel more confidence in life—but less—if some day we find that once in a while a heart-beat fails. And so, if we felt obliged to believe that once in the long centuries the pulsation of the heavens had stopped for half a day, would it not weaken our confidence in God rather than strengthen it? Man's real faith rests not on the chance of this solemn order stopping, but on the sense of its secure and massive certainty! The more we feel that unerring certainty, and the more that ties itself in with all the other impressions of the world's mighty life and meaning, the more the mere physical fact enlarges into a moral and spiritual fact. This orderliness of Nature is, in its higher aspect, the faithfulness of God.—

Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong,
And the most ancient heavens, thro' thee are fresh and strong.

But there are things that come closer to our common daily living and daily need than this vast impassive order.

1. See how 'day unto day uttereth speech' of a certain righteous order working out in life. Turn from the great movement of the universe to our own little doings—the child's lessons, the woman's busy care, the man's tasks,—our pleasures, our temptations, our perplexities. Is it all a tangle through which we have to pick our own way? Or is there a moral order behind our little way, some principle of right in things, which we have to try to keep hold of? We could hardly judge from a single day. We cannot see much moral working out of life in a day. For to-day, looking at to-day by itself, a lie may seem the very wisest and fittest thing. For to-day, by itself, it may seem quite the pleasantest and easiest way to be selfish, or idle. But watch—as 'day unto day' moves on, and the unerring to-morrows come! It may not seem to matter in any single day, but 'day unto day'—there

[1] F. Langbridge, *Little Tapers*, 43.

we see how the only thing that pays is right! And so it is in all the working out of life. It is 'day unto day' that makes the wise man, and 'day unto day' that makes the fool. It is 'day unto day' that makes the good man, 'day unto day' that makes the knave. It is 'day unto day' that fastens action into habit, and hardens habit into second nature. It is 'day unto day' that makes even the blacksmith's arm strong, and the rower's stroke firm, and the cricketer's hand and eye sure; and so, far more, it is 'day unto day' that rivets the chain of vice, or that silently builds up the strong, good, wholesome manhood in which is the real joy of life and the strength and hope of the world.

2. 'Day unto day' not only brings out the moral issue of our own doings, but it brings out also the wise providence of God. Nobody will ever get much faith in God's providence by looking at a single day. Take the world for any single day, look at it only so, and it seems a strange confusion. The wicked prospering and the good suffering; wrong successful, and right hopelessly trodden down; men who are sorely wanted, dying, and men who could well be spared lengthening out their days; Cæsar in the purple and Christ upon the Cross!

Or let us take our own life in any single day and it is much the same: our best plans, perhaps, upset by others; the thing we most crave, not happening; troubles coming that we have not deserved; and if we cry for deliverance, our prayer does not seem to produce at the moment the least effect. So it is in the view of any single day. But watch the days, 'day unto day'; watch them as they lengthen out into long years, and it is very different. We begin to see a pattern in the years. Slowly a meaning shapes itself. It is not our meaning. We tried to shape the years to our meaning, and they would not be so shaped! We planned things thus and so, and they came out quite differently. Has all, then, been meaningless? Our meaning failing, has there been none? Few of us feel so, as we quietly look back upon our past life. On the contrary, we feel meaning all along, and not a smaller but a larger meaning. Events that seemed utterly unconnected have silently fitted together; troubles we writhed under and struggled against have by and by wrought blessing; things have somehow worked together, and they have worked together 'for good.' If we could see only one day's life, we could hardly believe in providence. But as we watch day by day, and see the silent unfoldings of the lengthening years, we cannot help believing.

Hemmed in by petty thoughts and petty things,
Intent on toys and trifles all my years,
Pleased by life's gauds, pained by its pricks and stings,
Swayed by ignoble hopes, ignoble fears;
Threading life's tangled maze without life's clue,
Busy with means, yet heedless of their ends,
Lost to all sense of what is real and true,
Blind to the goal to which all Nature tends:—
Such is my surface self: but deep beneath,
A mighty actor on a world-wide stage,
Crowned with all knowledge, lord of life and death,
Sure of my aim, sure of my heritage,—
I—the true self—live on, in self's despite,
That 'life profound' whose darkness is God's light.[1]

Day and Night.

Ps. xix. 2.—'Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.'

What a difference there is between the utterance of the day and that of the night. The strain of day seems in the major key, that of night in the minor. The impression of day seems to be that of intense energy—a certain sense of mighty, omnipotent, omnipresent life in all things. On the other hand, night with its silences, alike by what it hides and what

[1] E. G. A. Holmes.

it reveals, impresses us, as nothing else does, with the sense of infinity and eternity.

1. With the day are associated all our most vivid perceptions of activity. It is not only that it is the time of man's most restless movement. It seems the same in Nature. There is stillness nowhere. The earth seems teeming, bubbling over, with that mysterious thing—life. This is true not only of the birds and the insects with their ceaseless movement; the still life of plant and tree is quick with subtler forces almost more wonderful when we think them out. Cell adds itself to cell. A rhythmic life beats through the whole creation with a tremulous creative and developing meaning in it. The forces work everywhere to meaning. Whose meaning? Not man's! Man does not originate it, he only discerns it —and if man did not discern it, it would be going on just the same. And what little of it man does spell out and discern is only the tiniest part, only the most outward and palpable part, of all the meaning. To those who have ears to hear, the day is alive with this impression of mighty, omnipresent, Divine activity.

2. Note the change of feeling which comes as day fades into night. The sun is setting, and our side of the busy world seems to be sinking into rest. The voices of children and the busy hum of toil are hushed. The notes of birds, the varied sounds of Nature, grow fewer. Of course all activity does not cease, but a great deal does, and much of that which still goes on we no longer see, and it ceases to impress us. Then, as the stir of activity quietens down, a new impression comes in—a sense of silent immensity. The very sounds which do still fall upon the ear seem only to emphasize the general stillness, for sounds which during the day are quite lost in the general stir of the world stand out at night with a strange clearness. In the country, the sighing of the wind, the rush of a little stream or the murmur of the distant sea, the cry of a night-bird and the dull tinkle of a sheep-bell; in the city, a footfall in the street, the whistle of a distant train. When we go out into that silence, and stand in the full impression of it, do we not feel as if we knew what the Psalmist meant when he shaped the word that was borne into his heart into that deep saying—'Be still, and know that I am God'? And the impression through the ear is helped by the impression through the eye. We can no longer see our little world. What we do see is:

> The evening air
> Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars.

—a multitude of worlds so distant, and so vast, that involuntarily the thought arises: 'What is man that thou art mindful of him?'

Do you remember that sonnet of Blanco White's, which expresses the idea of how night, hiding much, reveals infinitely more?—

> Mysterious Night, when our first parent knew
> Thee by report Divine, and heard thy name,
> Did he not tremble for this goodly frame,
> This glorious canopy of light and blue?
> But through a curtain of translucent dew,
> Hesperus with the host of heaven came,
> Bathed in the hues of the great setting flame.
> And lo! Creation broadened to man's view.
> Who could have guessed such darkness lay concealed
> Within thy beams, O Sun, or who divined,
> When flower, and leaf, and insect lay revealed,
> Thou to such countless worlds hadst made us blind?
> Why should we then shun death with anxious strife?
> If Light could thus deceive, wherefore not Life?

Yes! 'If Light could thus deceive, wherefore not Life?' May it not be that the very glare and nearness of our present life may hide from us a realm of being as much vaster than this as the deep spaces of the stars are vaster than the little distances of earth? So night enlarges the impressiveness of day. It is not good to be always looking at the details of anything; so doing, we are apt to miss the deeper, grander meaning of the whole.

¶ Look at your friend's face through a microscope, and all you can see is flesh and

tissue—and the more you increase the magnifying power the more it is simply material that you see. But look at that face simply with the natural eye, and you see—less of the tissue, indeed, but that which is infinitely finer—meaning, thought, expression—your friend. So look at the heavens through your telescope, and you see, indeed, its material and mechanical details far more clearly, but you lose perhaps something of its impression. Young, in his *Night Thoughts,* said—'An undevout astronomer is mad.' I am not so sure of that. He came nearer the truth perhaps when he said that other word:—

By night the atheist half believes a God!

The astronomy which seems to bridge the immensities and makes men feel as familiar with the heavens as with the earth may, taken by itself, rather chill the sense of awe. It is not to the larger lens that 'the night showeth' its deepest knowledge, but to the inward eye of quiet thought and to the open soul of reverent feeling.[1]

Day uttereth speech to day, and night to night
Tells of Thy power and glory. So would we,
Thy children duly, with the morning light,
Or at still eve, upon the bended knee
Adore Thee, O our God.[2]

God's Silent Voices.

Ps. xix. 3.—'There is no speech nor language; their voice cannot be heard' (RV).

The Psalmist has just said, 'Day unto day uttereth speech'; and he says now, 'There is no speech.'

1. This is God's method in *Nature.* Nature has neither speech nor language, her voices are not heard. Sun, moon, and stars, mountain and valley, flower and tree, alike are silent. The ocean may roar, the wind may sigh, the birds may sing, but they have no articulate voice—no key has ever been found to their language; it has never been translated into any human equivalent. Nature never puts her meaning into words of any language, and yet her sound has gone forth through all lands, and her words to the end of the world.

There's not the smallest orb that thou beholdest,
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubim.

Everywhere men have heard, and in greater or less degree have felt her meaning. The old rendering of the third verse of this Psalm, though it does not represent the original, is yet true in fact—'There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard'—heard so clearly that in almost every land men have been drawn to the worship of Nature. To the Persian the sun spoke so clearly that he made it the object of his worship. To the Greek earth and ocean, sun and moon seemed alive with a Divine presence. To the ancient Druids the heavenly bodies spoke so clearly that in their rude stone temples, open to the sky, they worshipped the orbs of heaven. To many a savage earth has been so eloquent that he invested it with a Divine significance, and offered it, in his rude way, Divine honours. To Wordsworth the voices of Nature were as clear as if angels sang above his head. In 'A Voluntary composed upon an evening of extraordinary splendour and beauty,' he says—

Time was when field and watery cove
With modulated echoes rang,
While choirs of fervent Angels sang
Their vespers in the grove;
Or crowning, star-like, each some sovereign height,
Warbled, for heaven above and earth below,
Strains suitable for both. Such holy rite,
Methinks, if audibly repeated now
From hill or valley, could not move
Sublimer transport, purer love,
Than doth this silent spectacle—the gleam—
The shadow—and the peace supreme.

[1] B. Herford.
[2] W. H. Burleigh.

2. This is God's method in *man*. The greatest philosopher of modern times was most deeply impressed by the starry heavens above and the moral law within. And of the moral law, as of the starry heavens, it may be said, 'It has neither speech nor language; its voice is not heard.' Conscience is as silent as the eternal heavens; it never reaches articulate expression. Sometimes, it is true, it is so aroused that it clothes its commands in words, and, as we lean to evil, cries with majestic voice, 'Thou shalt not,' or, as we shrink back from the good, with tones of entreaty declares, 'This do and thou shalt live.' But the words are only a human clothing of a Divine reality; just as Luther, in the castle of the Wartburg, tempted of evil, in imagination gave it bodily form, and threw at it the ink-horn with which he was writing. No bodily form was there which his ink-horn could mark or wound; intercepted by no Satanic body, it only reached and left its stain on the castle wall. And conscience is too spiritual to speak in words; it is a spirit bearing witness within our spirit, moving across the troubled waters of the soul so as to direct its course aright. Its realm is feeling and awakened thought; it is a force, not a voice; it is a constraint, not a revelation.

Of old our fathers heard thee when the roll
Of midnight thunder crashed across the sky:
I hear thee in the silence of the soul—
Its very stillness is the majesty
Of thy mysterious voice, that moves me more
Than wrath of tempest as it rushes by,
Or booming thunder, or the surging roar
Of seas that storm a never-trodden shore.[1]

3. This is God's method in *revelation*. Of the Divine revelation it may be said, Here God has neither speech nor language; His voice is not heard. God's voice, as that of Nature, is a silent one; it is not heard with the ear, but felt in the heart, an altogether higher and nobler realm for the Divine. Indeed, the Prophet Jeremiah expressly says, 'But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord. I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their hearts will I write it.' But you say, 'Does not Scripture often come to us with the declaration, "Thus saith the Lord"?' Assuredly it does; but it does not follow that the saying was to the ears of men. Elijah was most deeply moved, not by the fire, or the earthquake, or the wind, but by 'the still small voice,' which is surely only another way of describing a silence which might be felt, felt all the more keenly after the mighty sounds which preceded. When Judas asked, 'How is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us and not unto the world?' this was the answer of our Lord, 'If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him.' No assurance is here of any audible voice. It is by presence, not by speech, that He will be revealed.

¶ Count Zinzendorf once stood before a picture of Christ on the cross, underneath which was written, 'I did all this for thee, what hast thou done for me?' No voice fell on his ear, but a great emotion passed over his heart, and led him to yield himself to one crucified for him.[1]

[1] E. G. A. Holmes.

The Strong Man.

Ps. xix. 5.—'Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race' (RV 'his course').

Why has this nineteenth Psalm been chosen as one of the proper Psalms for Christmas Day? The thoughts of the Psalmist pass from the heavens and from the sun, the most glorious object in the heavens, to the Scriptures, from the revelation which the God of Nature has made of Himself to the whole world to the further revelation which He has made of Himself as the God of grace to His chosen people. What is there in this that has anything to do with the birth of Christ? We must look at the words of the text, if we would know why this Psalm has been chosen as one of the Psalms

[1] W. G. Horder

suitable for Christmas Day. You may remember that the coming of Christ into the world is described by the prophet Malachi as the rising of the Sun of righteousness; and Christian writers have applied the words of the text also to Him. The Psalmist's words, which describe the glorious appearance and the triumphant progress of the sun in the heavens, may be said to be a prophecy, though the Psalmist himself was not aware of it. They are a representation in picture language of the glory of our incarnate Lord.

1. The sun is first of all like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber. The radiant appearance of the bridegroom as he is seen on his wedding-day in all the freshness of his youth or early manhood, the desire of whose heart is satisfied, who is entering upon a new life, seems to be the idea that is present to the Psalmist's mind. The brightness of sunrise, the freshness of the morning light, the gladness of feeling which we associate with it, are here compared to the radiance, vigorous life and joy of the bridegroom. And morning by morning, like the bridegroom on his wedding-day, the sun seems to enter upon a fresh life.

Now when we turn our thoughts from the material sun to the Sun of righteousness, the brightness of His rising is His appearance in human nature as it was in the days of man's innocence. It was then that He began to cast His bright beams of light upon the darkness of fallen humanity. On Christmas Day we contemplate the mystery of the Incarnation. 'The Son of God,' God of God, Light of Light, Very God of God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by Whom all things were made, for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man.' He shared the glory of the Father before the world was, but for our sakes He emptied Himself of it, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. As the bridegroom upon his wedding-day takes leave of his old life, and enters upon a new life with his loved bride, so He who came to be the bridegroom of the Church gladly submitted Himself to new conditions for the sake of His bride. He became incarnate for ever, binding Himself to human nature with a tie which shall never be broken. He has taught His church to say 'My beloved is mine, and I am his.' 'Thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel.' We have to contemplate Him to-day in the radiance of His Divine nature and also in the radiance of that human nature undefiled which God gave to the first Adam, and gave again to the Second.

2. The second comparison is to a strong man or giant. The alacrity with which a strong man would enter upon a race which he was well qualified to win, his confident expectation of success, his well sustained strength in running, seem to be the ideas that are present to the Psalmist's mind. The triumphant progress of the sun in its onward course from one end of the heaven to the other is here compared to the endurance of the powerful runner from the beginning of his course to the end of it. And by a figure of speech the rejoicing of a strong man as he enters upon a race, his alacrity, and confident expectation of success, are here attributed to the sun.

Now when we turn our thoughts from the material sun to the Sun of righteousness, we say of Him with absolute truth that He rejoiced to run His course. The course which He had to run was the work which God had given Him to do. He came to show by His conduct and character what man at the creation of human nature was intended to be, how innocence might have been elevated into holiness, how the suggestions of the tempter might have been resisted, how man's true happiness might have been realized by simply doing the will of God. He came, therefore, to show what man's lost estate was, but He came also to recover it for fallen man. He came to justify God and to instruct man by His life, to take away sin and to reconcile sinners to God by His death. He rejoiced to run His course, to do and to submit Himself to His Father's will. With reference to His life of

obedience He said, 'I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.'

When we turn from the contemplation of His life as our example to the closing scenes of Gethsemane and Calvary, what do we find? Flesh and blood could not encounter the cross without some mixture of feeling. Sinlessness could not but be troubled by the prospect of the burden of all sin. But in the subordination of His human will to the Divine will He never wavered. He yielded Himself up to the obedience of suffering with resignation because it was the Father's will. Joy lay beyond the sorrow; He had the prospect of it; and for the sake of it He embraced the sorrow which lay between. 'For the joy that was set before him' of saving helpless sinners He 'endured the cross, despising the shame.' If Paul in prospect of his sufferings felt that none of these things moved him, and counted not his life dear unto himself so that he might finish his course with joy, how much more was this the feeling of Paul's Master!

¶ It was the joy of Jesus—satisfaction and elation in the thought and use of that life, hourly and momentarily emerging from the fullness of his inner self—that held him in the years of his labour and humiliation. For men he made beatitudes that were of the substance and soul of himself; but his own beatitude was 'the joy which was set before him'—the approaching coalescence of his own soul with that of the Father in his perfected Galilæan life. For that he endured the cross and despised the shame, and in realization of it sat down 'at the right hand of the throne of God.' With no ideal of the Galilæan blessedness do our minds so readily associate the daily life of Christ as with the *eirene*, the peace that was his as a possession, the peace which he came to bestow upon men. It was virtue and beauty in his walk and conversation; but it was, above all, the state which obtained in the unity of his hidden powers of divinity and human fulfilling.[1]

[1] H. E. M. Du Bose, *The Consciousness of Jesus*, 76.

In His Passion He was strong,
Out of dear compassion, weak;
Thus with no uncertain tongue
Silent Love to us did speak.

He was stricken for our health,
Watching, took our leprosy;
For our royal Commonwealth
Bare with utmost tyranny;

For our vantage He was kissed,
For our gain was cheaply sold,
Like a cunning alchemist,
Turning basest dross to gold;

He was stripped to clothe our shame;
Blood-drowned for our anchorage;
Infamous for our fair fame;
Outcast for our heritage;

For our speech He spake no words;
For our pride became a dove;
He was bound with many cords,
And the straitest cord was Love.

Man's acquittal was His guilt,
He, disfranchised, made us free;
For our stain His blood was spilt;
For our fruit He clomb the Tree.

Love constrained Him to the Cross,
He His strength for weakness gave;
He saved others at His loss,
But Himself He could not save![1]

Sweet Judgments.

Ps. xix. 9, 10.—'The judgments of the Lord are . . . sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.'

THE Psalm from which these words are taken describes the glory of God in creation. It places side by side, not for the sake of contrast, but for the sake of completion, the two grand ideas of a Divine revelation in Nature and a Divine revelation in the book of the law.

In the verses of the text the Psalmist illustrates the special feature of the law by a common product of Nature. He compares the

[1] A. V. Phillips, *Life and Way*, 111.

judgments of the Lord in sweetness to honey and the honeycomb. We can interpret these judgments in a twofold sense. They may mean either the verdicts of the Great Judge in regard to human action, the rules which He has laid down in His Word for the regulation of human life; or they may mean the actual execution of the law in human experience—the bestowing of the reward upon the obedient, or the reflection of the penalty upon the transgressor. But it will serve no practical purpose to separate these two meanings from one another, for they are virtually one; the law and the executive are both combined in God. And in both aspects His judgments are sweeter than honey and the honeycomb. 'The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.'

1. God's requirements can have no other aim or end than man's truest happiness. It is only in being holy as the law is holy that we can be happy as God would wish us to be happy. Holiness and happiness are identical in human life. But we too often forget the requirement to be holy in the attempt to be happy. The demands of our lower nature, our bodily and social impulses which crave for immediate enjoyment, too frequently disagree with those of our higher nature, and bid us live, not under the dominion of sense and sight, but under the powers of the world to come. And thus, in the want of harmony between God's law and our own sinful, selfish desires, the judgments of the Lord come in and apportion, by an eternal decree and an inflexible justice, the suffering to the sin. But even the justice of God has mercy at its heart; and His severest judgments have at their root the tenderest solicitude for our true welfare. The pain is meant to correct the evil tendency of our nature, and the suffering to lead the wayward soul back into the right path. Thus what seems to contradict the goodness of God is but a higher proof of it. Pain and sorrow, which would seem to prove that our happiness is counted for nothing, are only means to promote that happiness more effectually; and, as the poet says, 'Every cloud that veileth love, itself is love.'

It is one of the most striking things in Nature that objects are fitted for a new purpose by becoming unfitted for their primary purpose. Thus the nectary of a flower is regarded by scientific botanists as a degenerated stamen; that is, a stamen that no longer serves its original object in helping to propagate the plant; and yet, strange to say, in its altered form this nectary or degenerate stamen secretes a sweet liquid which attracts bees and other insects, by whose entrance into the flower the pollen-dust is scattered and carried from one blossom to another. In this way the nectary helps to fertilize the plant more effectually, and fulfils its part in the economy of the flower in a more admirable manner than if it had retained its original form and function.

2. It is the consciousness of a greater life that reconciles the apparent contradictions of this. The pain of the hour is unbearable when regarded in its relation to the whole life of the individual. Is it not true that our hours of sorrow are sorrowful chiefly because we feel them singly and apart from the rest of life? If every danger were accompanied by its deliverance, and every perplexity by its extrication, and every night of heaviness by the joy that ushered in the morning; if all our sorrows and sufferings were blended with the whole life, with all its joys and successes—like the discords in music, they would render the harmony more perfect; like the bitter ingredients in an exhilarating draught, they would give higher zest to the compound; like shadows in a landscape, they would give greater effect to the general design. Just as the imperfection of a particular part gives to the whole flower a higher perfection, enriches it with a new product, and enables it to accomplish more effectively the general design of its existence, so the imperfections of human lives may be the means of making them more perfect from a higher point of view, may make them richer in spiritual graces, and fairer with heavenly beauties, and may enable them to accomplish the great end of life more effectually.

Viewed in itself, the nectary of the flower is a degenerate stamen; it has failed to reach its ideal form; it has lost its power to carry on the function for which it was intended. And not only is it a failure in itself, but it is the means of diverting the grains of starch from their purpose in building up the structure of the flower, and converting them into a sweet substance which is of no use directly to the plant itself. But when we look at the nectary from the larger point of view of the whole economy of the flower, we see that its failure is a higher success, and its particular uselessness the means of greater general efficiency. And so when we place the things that are seen and temporal in their relation to the things that are unseen and eternal, then our afflictions are found to be light and transitory, and to be working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. What is imperfect in this life is a proof of the larger and more perfect being after death; for all that belongs to the vaster whole of eternity must necessarily, from the narrow standpoint of earth, look fragmentary and bear the marks of incompleteness. It is upon the apprehension of this vital relationship to the grand whole that the judgments of God which appear to us in the form of failures and impoverishments of life—trial and disappointment and sorrow—are sweeter than honey and the honeycomb.

3. As a rule, it is flowers with irregular blossoms departing from the law of symmetry that have a nectary; and it is a curious circumstance that, where there is a part of a blossom which differs from the other parts in form or size, it is the odd piece that has the richest colour on it. It is the odd piece, for instance, in the blossom of the common pansy that has the brilliant streaked eye, while the regular petals are of a uniform colour. We see in this the visible finger of God making up to the part of the blossom which He has made singular for its want of symmetry, giving more honour to that which lacked it. And how true is this law in the higher life of man! It is not the symmetrical life—all prosperity and outward joy, and success—that has the honeyed sweetness of heaven stored up in it, and the beauty of heaven reflected upon it; but the life that is repressed and made singular by want and woe. There is no blossom of human life, however fair and flourishing, that does not indicate some imperfection. There is some part or other that has failed to reach its ideal, whose purpose has been frustrated. Every heart knoweth its own bitterness; and there is a sorrow with which no stranger can intermeddle. Prosperous and happy to the eye of others, there may be some secret want or trial that mars our happiness and spoils the zest of our prosperity. Some earnest purpose or long-cherished plan is defeated, some fond hope is disappointed, some affection of the heart has failed to find a sympathetic return, some fair dream has been dissipated by a cold and hard reality. We dwell upon the one imperfection more than upon all the fair proportion and rich capacity of our life. We exaggerate its pain and loss. And yet God can convert that privation or loss into a means of greater blessedness, as He converts the degenerate stamen of a flower into a nectary. He can give us honey out of the severest disappointment; and from the very frustration of our fondest hope produce what is sweeter than the honeycomb.[1]

¶ Oliver Goldsmith climbed Mount Disappointment. In 1756, after having obtained a doctor's degree, he found himself without a shilling in his pocket. 'He pounded drugs,' Macaulay says, 'and ran about London with phials for charitable chemists.' Then he aspired to the unambitious post of mate to a naval hospital. He presented himself at Surgeon's Hall as an applicant for the position. To his great chagrin, he was rejected. The record in the college book reads: 'James Bernard, mate to an hospital; Oliver Goldsmith found not qualified for ditto.' He was *bitterly disappointed.* In his disappointment he seized a pen and began to write. Eight years later *The Vicar of Wakefield*—one of

[1] H. Macmillan.

our very greatest classics—was given to the world. 'Genius'—to use Mr. W. J. Lacey's words—'transmuted Goldsmith's disappointment into a golden service to English letters.' [1]

Secret Faults.

Ps. xix. 12.—'Cleanse thou me from secret faults.'

We understand what is meant by secret faults. They are the faults that are secret from ourselves. They are the sins and failings in our life of which we are unconscious. There are some faults we can keep secret from the world, and yet they are well known to those at home. The people we meet in the street may not suspect them, but the wife or the mother knows them all too well. And there are other sins which a man may do in business, so that his name smells rank amid honourable dealers, yet the shadow of them may never touch his home or the innocent faces of his adoring children. Such faults are secret beyond a certain circle. Love casts the mantle of her glorious silence round them. But it is not these of which the Psalmist thinks when he cries, 'Cleanse thou me from secret faults.' He thinks of the sins which, in the sight of God, we are committing and yet are ignorant of. We have never been awakened to them, and are not conscious they are there at all.

1. That there are such faults in every one of us may be demonstrated along many lines.

(1) Think, for instance, how certain this becomes when we remember what we see in others. Is there any one known to us, however good or beautiful, on whose faults or failings we could not put our finger? Is there any friend or lover or child or wife or minister whose weakness we have not long ago detected? They may not see it—it never obtrudes on them—they are quite unconscious that it is striking us. And so do our neighbours move among us daily, and we see a hundred faults which they are blind to. The very fact that all of us can see the mote that is in our brother's eye is proof that there is somewhat in our own.

(2) The certainty of such faults is proved again by our general ignorance of our own nature. There is not a man or woman whose life is not full of secret possibilities. Let the finger of love but touch a woman's heart, and you will hardly know that woman by and by. Let motherhood come wth all its infinite mystery, and she is enriched unto the very heavens. Let a man be converted by the grace of God, as Paul was converted on the Damascus road, and life is expanded into undreamed-of fullness. We all surprise each other now and then, and now and then we all surprise ourselves—when love comes, or some great wave of feeling, or the sound of trumpet and the call to battle. And if we believe in secret possibilities must we not also believe in secret sins? The fact is, we should believe it instantly if it were not for the presence of self-love. Love thinketh no evil of the loved one, even when the loved one is oneself. And so in our secret virtues we believe, and in the hidden possibilities within us, but from our secret faults we turn away.

(3) Once again, we should infer this truth from the deadening power of long-continued habit. There are sins which were not secret long ago, but habit and custom have made them secret now. For good or for evil, in this life of ours, habit is always busy. And so the sins that long ago were open, and shocked us, and made us blush to think of them, may have become with passing years our secret sins. We should have been very unhappy once, when day was over, if we had flung ourselves down upon a prayerless bed. And yet it may be that we do it now with never a thought that we are grieving God. We should have been miserable once, and full of guilty shame, had we been cruel, dishonest, or impure. And yet it may be that to-day we sin these sins without any inward unhappiness at all. That is Satan's triumph—to take our open sins and make them secret: to take the faults that shamed us long ago, and make us habituated and accustomed to them. When a man has

[1] F. W. Boreham, *Mountains in the Mist*, 259.

ceased to be shamed and shocked by sin, when he does habitually what once he loathed and hated, let him beware for his immortal soul, for final impenitency croucheth at the door. 'Cleanse thou me, O Lord, from secret faults.'

2. Among all our sins there are perhaps none more perilous than our secret sins. And they are perilous just because in them we have the preparation for our open falls. Our great sins are seldom momentary overthrows. They seldom reach us like bolts out of the blue. Those dark and tragic falls that we all know are not isolated and independent things. They reach us by the hidden ways of darkness, and out of the silent and interior life, so that on every hour of wreckage and disaster there is the pressure of our secret faults. For every noble act we ever did, there was a conscious and an unconscious preparation. We were getting ready for it not only when we strove: we were getting ready when we never dreamed of it. By every virtue we clung to in the dark—by every beautiful thought we ever cherished—by the self-denials of each common morning—we have been getting ready for our nobler hours. That is the road by which we reach our victories, and that is the road by which we reach our tragedies. Our sudden overthrows, when character was forfeited, are never quite so sudden as we think. Through secret faults—through covetings unchecked—through lusts unbridled when they were still imaginings—does a man go out to his hours when peace is lost, and the shame of the vanquished is written on his brow.

¶ Professor Drummond, in his *Tropical Africa*, tells of the secret ravages of the white ants. He tells of their enormous powers of destruction, and how insidiously and secretly they work. He tells how a man may be sitting in his hut, and may think it as strong as on the day he built it, when suddenly he may waken to discover that there is nothing around him but a shell. Silently the white ants have been at work, eating out the heart of every beam: no one has seen them—no one has heard them toiling—no one has had any warning of their presence. And then in a moment comes the revelation, when the very pillars of the house do tremble, and the revelation is but secret ravage. 'Cleanse thou me from secret faults—keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins.' Answer that first prayer, our blessed Saviour, and in it we shall have our answer to the second. For all those open shames of word and deed that we cannot remember without self-loathing are but the lurid flowering of that nightshade whose roots are in the secret of the heart.[1]

Presumption.

Ps. xix. 13.—'Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.'

When the Psalmist prayed, 'Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins,' he was probably referring to a specially defiant class of transgressions for which in Hebrew religion there was no atonement. Anyone who sinned deliberately was hopeless. To commit a flagrant offence against God's law, to defy Him with a high hand, excluded a man from forgiveness.

But presumptuousness itself is a sin. And in our day of rampant liberty there is a risk of this sin invading our religion. Christianity is the religion of liberty which God gives to us; we may abuse it by taking undue liberties with Him. Voltaire noticed that in conversation Dr. Samuel Clarke never mentioned the name of God without a curious air of awe and self-recollection. It is this temper of awe that is in danger of being eliminated from our Christianity to-day. There is in some quarters a healthy reaction against formalism and distance in our approach to God, the regaining of faith in His Fatherhood, and in the true humanity of Jesus has rendered some older stiff phrases and conceptions unacceptable. Yet love means awe, and it is awe, reverence, the sense of God's greatness, which is apt to be left out in many of our modern approaches to the Lord.

[1] G. H. Morrison, *The Weaving of Glory*, 336ff.

1. In some cases reverence is left out just because we forget that He is our Lord. 'Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins'; it is the sense of being His servants that will save us from presumption. Who are we to criticize or challenge His ways so glibly? When we take such liberties it is because we have forgotten our true position towards Him. Goethe tells us candidly how Fräulein von Klettenberg, 'the Beautiful Soul' whose Christian spirit affected him so deeply, used to criticize frankly his young, self-confident, petulant temper in religion. 'She assured me in plain terms that all this proceeded from my having no reconciled God. Now, I had believed from my youth upwards that I stood on very good terms with my God. Nay, I even fancied to myself, in the light of various experiences, that He might even be in arrears in His account with me, and I was daring enough to think that I had something to forgive Him. This presumption was based upon my infinite good intentions, which, it seemed to me, He should have assisted more actively.'

Goethe here analyses a mood which is not uncommon, but which rarely expresses itself so frankly. It is at issue with the religion of the New Testament. Christ brings us into free access towards God; He removes our fears and hesitation by His revelation of a Father. But we are eternally indebted to God. The overwhelming impression made by Jesus Christ upon the soul is one of dependence upon God, which leaves no room for any easy-going feeling that we are naturally on good terms with Him, much less that we need to make allowances for Him. He is Lord, we are His servants. What He is to us, what He does for us, obliterates every feeling save those of utter devotion and humble gratitude. The slightest inclination to regard ourselves as meritorious, and even as critics of His ways, is a sign of our relapse from the position of true believers. It marks a temper of undue familiarity and conceit that is quite incompatible with faith.

2. Even in circles of more ardent and positive Christianity, however, we are exposed to the same temptation. It besets the evangelical movement at every point, just because that movement is inspired by warm, personal, direct devotion. It is not that the sense of sin is minimized. It is rather that the expressions of fellowship and gratitude are apt to be presumptuous. The language of Christian love may be uncontrolled by adoration, and the prayers may be irreverent.

The temptation is plainly seen in a number of phases. Cowper notices it in Madame Guyon, for example. He agreed with Unwin that her devotional language occasionally betrayed undue familiarities with the great God. 'Woe to the sinner that shall dare to take a liberty with Him that is not warranted by His word, or to which He Himself has not encouraged him! I doubt not that it is possible to enjoy an access to Him even now unencumbered with ceremonious awe, easy, delightful, and without restraint. But I confess that through the weakness, the folly, and the corruption of human nature, this privilege, like all other Christian privileges, is liable to abuse. There is a mixture of evil in everything we do, indulgence encourages us to encroach, and while we exercise the rights of children, we become childish. Here I think is the point at which my authoress failed . . . dealing with God familiarly, but foolishly, irreverently, and without due attention to His majesty.'

It is a form of presumption to which our young people's movements are particularly exposed. Their spirit is one of the best signs of our age. They are making, and are to make, a deep contribution to the service of God's Kingdom and Church. But those who are most in sympathy with them occasionally detect a certain tendency to forwardness, not only in the rather cavalier attitude which they assume to the traditions of the past, but in the jaunty airs which now and then characterize their language about God. 'Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins,' from the sin of presumptuousness in prayer, in handling the Bible, in discussing the Christian mysteries. For presumptuousness spoils service, and to take liberties with the great God is to tamper with the springs of effectiveness. It is one thing to throw off stiffness in our

relations with God. It is a great gain to learn how to address Him naturally and simply in our devotions. He does not mean us to keep at a distance from Him. But He is our Lord, when all is said and done. It is quite possible to be frank and open with Him, and at the same time to remember our position before Him.[1]

On the Heights.

Ps. xx. 1.—'The Lord answer thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob set thee up on high.'

1. When God answers it is not always to remove the trouble. Sometimes it is to use it for a great gain. Sweet are the uses of adversity, and one of the sweet uses of adversity is undoubtedly to heighten the joy of living. For joy is increased by contrast with sorrow, and if we had no depth of sorrow we should have little height of joy. A rugged, mountainous region has tremendous contrasts, and the alternations of deep fertile valleys with grim frowning precipices and the utter desolation of the storm-swept regions above the height of vegetation—these constitute its charm. The flat plain is teeming with life, but it has not the interest of the windy height. Perhaps in our life we have climbed from the level of calm security to the awful passes of grief. We know the rush of the cataract and the crash of the mountain storm. Let us fear them not. We shall surmount the pass, we shall cross the ridge. For below us and beyond lie valleys of repose, and rest will be tenfold sweeter when we contrast it with the fury of the storm.

2. But again, adversity is necessary for real greatness. We can see this in a nation almost more clearly than in an individual. We need the perspective of history to distinguish those causes which have made nations great. Given moral stamina in a nation, would you not say that the great crises of its history have been among the main causes that contributed to its greatness? What English King struggled so long against fearful odds as Alfred? And who has done so much for Church and State as that bright example of English manhood? Ten generations back our ancestors led their little fleet against the mighty Armada, and has England once looked backward since? A century ago we were struggling, almost in despair, in the Napoleonic wars, and they were the birth throes of a new era. It is the same in the individual. Let a man fight bravely against fearful odds, and he will become great. In calm security you may indeed be noble, but 'it is i' the imminent deadly breach' that you will become a hero. Adversity is necessary for true greatness.

> Life is not as idle ore,
> But iron dug from central gloom,
> And heated hot with burning fears,
> And dipt in baths of hissing tears,
> And batter'd with the shocks of doom
> To shape and use.

3. There is another way of regarding adversity. Life is an education, and education, to be real, needs sharp discipline. We learn things in adversity which otherwise we should never know. Acquaintances fall away; fair-weather friends are not to be relied upon. We cling the more closely to the few well-tried friends whom God has given us. Many occupations, for the hands, for the mind, for the tongue, for the feet, are now beyond our reach. There is one occupation left, which possibly has not been sufficiently practised, and it is for the knees. Even books have largely lost their interest, but we shall find that one old Book has gained a new value, and in that volume we shall turn chiefly to the Book of Psalms. 'The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble. . . . Now know I that the Lord saveth his anointed; he will bear him from his holy heaven with the saving strength of his right hand. Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God. They are brought down and fallen: but we are risen, and stand upright.

[1] *British Weekly*, Oct. 13, 1921.

4. There is yet another value in adversity. Often, as we pass through life, we feel the need of sympathy. We read books, we hear sermons, we join in conversation, and there is a sense of unreality in them all. 'The man,' you say, 'doesn't know what I feel. His life is in another atmosphere. Let him pass through the mill, and then he'll know what it is.' Isn't that so? Adversity is God's mill, and when we have passed through it, ground though we be to powder, we shall be as the finest wheat flour.

Grief halted at my door.
'My burden's great, and I'm footsore,'
Said he.
'Then, come thou in!'
I cried.
'The supper's spread—
The sweet rye bread.'
Grief put his burden down,
And stepped inside,
And, parting, left a gift with me—
The world-wide gift of Sympathy.[1]

The God of Jacob.

Ps. xx. 1.—'The name of the God of Jacob defend thee' (RV 'set thee up on high').

Jacob is the true father of the Israelitish nation. We see all the virtues and all the vices of the people in his nature and history. He and his life are Israel in miniature. And Israel is the microcosm of humanity—man on a small scale and under a strong light—in whose history can be discovered the method of God's dealings with all mankind. God chose to constitute Himself the guide of just such a pilgrim; to bear him through many self-inflicted miseries on the path of a true development; to teach him little by little courage, dignity, and faith; to crown his experienced old age with honour; and to receive him at last a war-worn veteran into the elect company on high.

(1) The God of Jacob tells us, by the very name, that He is a God who is not deterred by a great transgression, or by great proneness to transgression, from constituting Himself the guide of our pilgrim life. 'Long-suffering' is the quality which the name 'God of Jacob' specially suggests to us. Jacob was a man of many and grave infirmities. Because he was the reverse of a model man, because he trod the common levels of human folly and sin, because he had in him a nature which related him to the basest of men on the one hand, while it gave him an affinity with the noblest on the other, God chose him as the typical pilgrim, and made a special exemplar of his life. He began life with a great transgression, like Adam, like ourselves. And the God who came to Adam with a promise which implied a pardon came also to Jacob, and comes to us all. God undertook the guidance of that man's pilgrimage because he was a sinful man, a man full of infirmities and treacheries, but with a nobler nature beneath and behind, which He made it His work to educate by suffering, until Jacob the supplanter became Israel the prince.

(2) The God of Jacob must be a God who can bear to inflict very stern chastisement on His children, and to train His pilgrims in a very hard, sharp school of discipline, without forfeiting the name of their merciful and loving God. 'Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been,' said the aged patriarch, reviewing his life course before Pharaoh. Why? Because through life he had been under the hard, stern discipline of the hand of God. God had not suffered him to grow wanton in a splendid prosperity. He had evil powers and passions within him which needed to be taught restraint by suffering; and God made him suffer, sharply and even terribly, until he had mastered them. And so, as his life was spent in learning, it was spent in suffering, and God did not shrink from wielding the scourge to the very close. Thus he witnessed a sad confession before Pharaoh, which probably neither Abraham nor Isaac would have witnessed. The life of the one was far nobler, the life of the other was far more simple and contented. They lived better and happier lives than Jacob; but at

[1] R. C. Sheffield.

the same time it is his special character, and the stern Divine discipline which it provoked and endured, that make his life so rich in instruction, and constitute him the typical pilgrim of the world.

(3) The God of Jacob is the God who will bring the pilgrims home. 'He is not ashamed to be called their God, for he hath prepared for them a city.' Consider all the way, the long, far, weary way, by which God led that man; but He brought him home at last. Home with all his wealth about him; not a fugitive but a conqueror; able to lift up his head with honour among the mightiest of his time. And the Lord will bring us in. The last chapters of Isaiah are a kind of prophetic triumphal song of the elect host, His pilgrims of life, as He brings them with joy and songs to 'the city which hath foundations, eternal in the heavens, whose builder and maker is God.' The angel who redeemed Jacob from all evil is redeeming us through pain as sharp, through patience as long, through discipline as stern. And He has caused all this to be written for our learning, that the hope of a final and eternal triumph over evil might sustain us through the conflict, through the wanderings, and assure us that in His own good time the God of the pilgrim Jacob will bring us into His rest.

Lead me—once more I pray—
Even should it be against my will, Thy way.
Let me not feel Thee foreign any hour,
Or shrink from Thee as an estrangèd power.
Through doubt, through faith, through bliss, through stark dismay,
Through sunshine, wind, or snow, or fog, or shower,
Draw me to Thee who art my only day.[1]

Unexpected Good Things.

Ps. xxi. 3.—'Thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness.'

THERE has been a change of meaning in the word 'prevent' since the days of the translation of the Authorized version, or rather, as so often happens in the history of words, the meaning has taken on a different colour. 'Prevent' means simply to go before, and, in the sense of our text, to go before in order to help, to clear the way of difficulties, to anticipate and prepare for the person following. We can see this sense in the beautiful old English collect: 'Prevent us, O Lord, in all our doing with Thy most gracious favour, and further us with Thy continual help.' Or in the 119th Psalm where the Psalmist says: 'I prevented the dawning of the morning and cried, I hoped in thy word. Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word'; meaning I anticipate with joy, go forward in imagination to be ready morning and evening to meditate on God. We can see how the more modern sense of the word has come to mean going before not to help but to hinder, to disappoint, to anticipate in order to check and frustrate and impede. But God's preventing, of which the Psalmist speaks, means His going before not in order to put obstacles in our way, but to remove them, and to put in their place the blessings of goodness.

The Psalmist means that God took him by surprise. There were many things he had prayed for: prayed for and hoped for, long and earnestly, until at last, after long waiting, came the answer, and in these blessings there was no surprise. But the Psalmist had found that the ways of heaven are infinitely diverse; and sometimes, before he ever prayed at all, the blessings of God had lighted in his bosom. It was that ministry of sweet surprise that touched him.

1. This element of surprise is found in Nature. We talk of the uniformity of Nature, and it is wonderful with what a steady march the days and seasons keep their appointed course: 'While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and heat and cold, and summer and winter, shall not fail.' One would think it would be a dull dead world where everything was so uniform as that. One would think we should grow weary of the earth when we could calculate on every

[1] G. Macdonald.

coming harvest. We grow so utterly tired of everything that has no possibility of the unexpected in it. That dread monotony God averts by His strange and beautiful method of surprise. I may have watched the coming of a score of spring-times; but when the next spring comes, with its throat of music and its cloak of green, it is all as fresh and wonderful to me as if there had never been a spring before. And the clouds and the sunsets, and the song of birds, these have been ours since we were little children; yet they are full of surprises for us still. It is that that makes this earth on which we dwell something far other than a dead machine. It is that that is forgotten by the men who think that the laws of Nature will explain everything. The glad surprise of every dawn and May day, in the teeth of iron and inexorable law, speaks, better than a hundred arguments, of the presence of an immanent Creator.

2. This element of surprise is found, too, in human character. It is not only geniuses that baffle us. In our most commonplace neighbour there is something that in a twinkling upsets our calculations. We thought we knew our neighbour perfectly. We had pigeonholed his character long ago. We had measured his powers by our little footrule. We understood him thoroughly, so we thought. But suddenly he is faced by opportunity, or a staggering blow falls, or a great crisis comes, and there flash from the man such gleams of heroism, such dauntless resource, such noble fortitude, that our old estimates go by the board at once. There were deeps in him that we had never dreamed of. 'The fire in the flint shows not till it be struck.' There were slumbering powers of dogged perseverance we never suspected in the easy days. We never thought he had it in him. And yet we said we knew him, and we judged him. Leave judging to God. It takes His infinite knowledge to do it well. Some day, under some sudden call, or at the sound of the trumpet stirring him to battle, the man will reveal such unexpected things that your knowledge of him will look shallow.

He sat within a house of pride,
  Walled in with walls of gold;
A decorous order froze the blood,
  And left his spirit cold.

Far-off he saw the citied world;
  At night, like some lone bird,
Romance sang at his window-pane:
  He heard, but never stirred.

One day an earthquake shook the house;
  Beam, buttress, cope and frame
Fell into utter dust—and lo,
  His soul leapt up like flame!

For the first time he saw the skies,
  High-vaulted, spacious, far;
He yearned to walk their streets of stars,
  And find his special star.

He thought he saw it beckon him,
  He followed where it led;
He trod a flame-mouthed scarp, he trod
  Among a thousand dead.

He battled over blood-stained seas,
  Marched over desert sands,
Hewed down the poison-tree of Wrong
  That cursed a hundred lands.

He flew his flag from pole to pole;
  The many things he did
Are written on the Arctic berg
  And on the Pyramid.

He wrought to justify his soul,
  To build a nation's might;
Froze, fasted, suffered, burned—and died
  On glory's topmost height.[1]

3. But God's surprises are greater than all. One thing which Scripture biography makes plain, is the large use that God makes of surprise in the training of His people. Recall the experience of Abraham. May not his life be described as a succession of surprises? He got one when he was called to leave his home at Ur, another when he was commanded to offer up Isaac, another when he was stayed from the sacrifice of his son by the voice of

[1] W. J. Dawson, *The Book of Courage*, 80.

Jehovah. Similarly, Jacob's life was full of them. He got one at Bethel, another when dwelling with Laban, another at Jabbok, and a great one when he was brought to the home of his long-lost son.

And God still makes use of this ministry of surprise. What are His purposes for us in doing so? Surely the first use of this ministry of heaven is just to keep alive our sense of wonder. But is it not also to increase our joy? There is not a father or a mother but has practised that sweet device with their children. What song and merry laughter on the birthday because of the little surprises of the birthday morning! Had the gifts been expected and counted on and seen, the birthday sun would never shine half so brightly. And 'like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him'—and out of the pity of His fatherly heart He is always eager to increase our joy. Were we never surprised at the sympathy we got when the shadow of trouble fell across the threshold? Were we never surprised at the friends we had, and we never knew it till the darkness? It may be that the darkness was our spiritual birthday, and the unexpected comradeship and love, and the sweet surprises of considerate hearts, all these have been God's birthday-gifts. Without them the cup of gall would have been doubly bitter. God used that ministry to make us glad.

And only to make us glad? Nay. To make us also wakeful, to keep us on the watch, that is the deepest purpose of our God in the unceasing method of surprise.

The Gift of Life.

Ps. xxi. 4.—'He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him, even length of days for ever and ever.'

THANKSGIVING for victory is the leading motive of the twenty-first Psalm. The Psalm is closely related to the preceding one. In Psalm xx. the king is preparing to go out to battle against formidable enemies, and before starting he offers solemn sacrifices and commits his cause to Jehovah. In Psalm xxi. the campaign is over. The victory is won. The people, with their king, are assembled to give thanks for the deliverance which Jehovah has wrought for them; and in the flush of victory they anticipate the future triumphs of their sovereign.

The exalted language, says Dr. Kirkpatrick,[1] of verses 4-6 has led some interpreters to regard the Psalm as purely Messianic. But this interpretation is excluded by the general sense of the Psalm. The language applied to the king is not without parallel in the Old Testament; and it is illustrated by expressions in the Assyrian royal Psalms: *e.g.*, 'Distant days, everlasting years, a strong weapon, a long life, many days of honour, supremacy among the kings, grant to the king, the lord, who made this offering to his gods' (quoted by Professor Cheyne). Israel was not uninfluenced by the thoughts and language common to Oriental nations: and if other nations believed that their kings were reflections of the divinity, Israel believed that its king was the representative of Jehovah. Language which startles us by its boldness was used of him: language which was adopted and adapted by the Holy Spirit with a prophetic purpose, and only receives its 'fulfilment' in Christ. The Psalm then has a prophetic aspect, and looks forward through the earthly king of whom it spoke in the first instance, to Him who 'must reign, till he hath put all his enemies under his feet.'

The writer of the Psalm prays that the king may live for ever. Now, long life was one of Jehovah's special blessings under the old covenant. It was a natural object of desire when the hope of a future life was all but a blank. But how then can 'length of days for ever and ever' be said of a mortal king? Partly in the same way as the salutation 'Let the king live for ever' was used (1 K. i. 31; Neh. ii. 3), partly because the king was regarded as living on in his posterity.

Let us see if this old prayer for life for ever and ever has any message for us.

[1] *The Psalms*, 110.

We, too, ask God for life. Every struggle for self-support, every shudder at the thought of dying, every delight in existence is a cry for life. We may not mean it for a prayer. We may not turn it Godward. With us, as we utter it, it may be a mere vague cry into the darkness, but God hears it as a cry to Him. It is exactly as if, walking upon the beach at night, we heard a drowning man shouting in terror. His shout would be in our ears a prayer to us, although he did not know that we were there, and shouted only in the vagueness of his terror. So every struggle that we make to live is a prayer to God for life. And the continuance of our existence is God's answer to our prayer.

But when we first take the life which God gives us we do not know what it is. Its depth, its richness opens to us only gradually. Only gradually do we learn that God has given to us not merely the power of present being and present enjoyment, but that wrapt up and hidden in that He has given us the power of thinking, feeling, loving, living in such deep and lofty ways that we may be in connection with the great continuous unbroken thoughts and feelings and movements of the universe. The life which He has given us is in its capacities not merely a thing of this moment. It is a part of the life of the universe. It is eternal life.

1. The unborn come to the birth and life is given. We all know how life at the beginning seems to be merely life, life in its first and simplest form. The unconscious infant lives in a mere animal existence. Later when the healthy boy begins to grow conscious of the delight of life, it is pure life, life simply as a fact, life not with reference to the deeper powers it contains or the far-off issues with which it has to do, that gives him such hourly delight in living. In this connection there comes back to us the ringing verse in which Browning has made David, when he was a boy, sing in the presence of King Saul of this pure consciousness of joy in the mere fact of being alive:

Oh, the wild joys of living! the leaping from rock up to rock,
The strong rending of boughs from the fir-tree, the cool silver shock
Of the plunge in a pool's living water, the hunt of the bear,
And the sultriness showing the lion is couched in his lair.
And the meal, the rich dates yellowed over with gold dust divine,
And the locust-flesh steeped in the pitcher, the full draught of wine,
And the sheep in the dried river-channel where bulrushes tell
That the water was wont to go warbling so softly and well.
How good is man's life, the mere living! how fit to employ
All the heart and the soul and the senses for ever in joy!

2. But by and by the time for the deeper look must come. Not always can David be content with the leaping from rock to rock, the plunge in the pool and the sleep in the dry bed of the summer brook. The thoughts and anxieties and duties of a man come crowding up into the life of the light-hearted boy. Care for things to which he once was all indifferent, hopes of things about which he once never dreamed, ambitions and desires of influence and power, the delight in half-discovered faculties, and, as the crown of all, conscious religion or the realized relationship with God, the love of and the obedience to Christ, all of these become his one after another. One after another life comes to mean these things. And now what shall we say? How have these things come to the man? See him at forty rich in all these, the earnest, thoughtful, religious man, full of associations with the world and with his fellow-man and God. This is the same being as the boy who played in simple health and thoughtlessness thirty years ago. How have all these things come to him? Have angels come down one by one, each bringing one of these new gifts, and put them one by one into his life? Have they not rather opened one by one out of that life

itself, called out by God, urged out by the half-blind desire to be all that it had within itself the capacity of being? There never was a moment when the hand of God touched Shakespeare's lips and bade him be the poet. Never a time when as a new endowment a breath from heaven gave to St. John the capacity to be a saint. Never a day when the nature of Raphael was filled with genius. These things were in these men from the beginning of their lives. When, as in Pope's imaginative picture, their spirits prayed for life, and when God gave them life, this was what God gave them. This poetry, this genius, this sublimeness was all wrapped up in that first gift of life when God said, 'Let this man be.' All that has to do with His own unending life was there. The eternal life of these men, this God gave to them. All that was to open out of their being for ever, all that they were to be on to the endless end, all this God gave them when He answered the prayer of their unborn spirits. They asked life of Him, and He gave them a long life, even for ever and ever.

¶ The greater life which man was made capable of enjoying is not something added on from without. That would be an unthinkable excrescence. It is the development of something already in man, its proper growth, its glory and unfolding.[1]

Forsaken.

Ps. xxii. 1.—'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'

That is the cry
Which echoes through the wilderness of earth,
Through song and sorrow, day and death and birth,
Why? Why? Why?
It is the high
Wail of the child with all his life to face,
It is the man's last question as he reaches space,
Why? Why? Why?

[1] J. M. Blake.

There are circumstances and expressions in this Psalm which hardly suit the case of its supposed author. There are things in it which far transcend the experience of David. In Christ alone, indeed, of all the sons of men are fulfilled all the various depictions of this most extraordinary poem. It begins in despair, it ends with the most triumphant hope. As the calamities it complains of are unexampled, so are they also undeserved. No consciousness of sin, no trace of having merited the suffering of which it speaks, appears throughout.

To quote Dr. Driver:—'Who is the speaker in the Psalm? In spite of the title, certainly not David: we know pretty fully the circumstances of his life; and we may be sure that he was never reduced to straits such as are here described: the prophetical expectation of the conversion of the nations appears otherwise for the first time long afterwards, in the writings of Isaiah: the easy, flowing style points also to a later age; and the Psalm is in parts palpably dependent upon Deutero-Isaiah. If the Psalm be a unity, also, the far-reaching consequences of the speaker's deliverance are much beyond what can be referred to David, or indeed to any single individual of the Old Testament dispensation. The speaker, it can hardly be doubted, is Israel. This, as Kautzsch observes, is the only supposition which does justice to the triumphant close of the Psalm (v. 22ff.), and makes it intelligible. The first person singular must not mislead us. In prose and poetry alike, Israel and other nations often speak, and are spoken to, or of, in the singular number.

The Psalmist, a godly Israelite himself, speaks in the person of the nation of which he is a member; and on the basis of his own and his nation's sufferings, constructs a 'mosaic of sufferings, to represent the woes of a faithful community, abandoned by God to their cruel foes.' The exact situation we do not know: but it must have been at some time after the return from Babylon, when misfortune and the hostility of envious neighbours combined to make the outlook dark, and fill Israel with the gloomiest apprehensions. The expressions need not be all understood

literally, any more than many of those in Lamentations iii. or Job xvi. In Lamentations iii. we read, for instance (v. 4), 'My flesh and my skin he hath worn out; he hath broken my bones' (v. 13), 'He hath made the shafts of his quiver to enter into my reins' (v. 16), 'He hath broken my teeth with gravel stones, he hath covered me with ashes,' and in Job xvi. (v. 13), 'His archers compass me round about, He cleaveth my reins asunder, and doth not spare, He poureth out my gall upon the ground.' These and many other passages show clearly that the language of Hebrew poetry is often not to be understood literally. The really striking thought in Psalm xxii. is that of the world-wide consequences attached to Israel's deliverance.

It is thus not an actual individual, it is faithful Israel, speaking as an individual, who is persecuted and delivered; and it is Israel's salvation which brings with it these far-reaching consequences affecting humanity at large. This view of the Psalm enables us to understand better than we could otherwise do its application to Christ. Christ is the ideal representative of Israel, the Man in whom the genius of Israel found its truest and fullest expression; the righteous servant of II. Isaiah is a prefigurement of Him; and the ideal both of the prophet and of the Psalm was fulfilled by Him. And so, though the Psalm is no *prediction* of the sufferings of Christ—for the intensely personal character of the descriptions shows that they spring from, and reflect, the personal experiences of the writer and his faithful compatriots—yet the sufferings of godly Israel, so pathetically described in it, were realized by Him in His person; while the glorious hopes for the future, with which the Psalm closes, foreshadow remarkably the blessed consequences of the life and death of Christ.[1]

[1] S. R. Driver, in *The Expositor*, 7th ser., 520ff.

Unanswered Prayer.

Ps. xxii. 2.—'O my God I cry in the day-time, but thou answerest not.'

Why is it that prayer is unanswered?

1. The chief reason, perhaps, is *lack of faith*. There can be no acceptable prayer where there is no faith; for if we do not believe God's word, and confide in His promises, we not only dishonour Him, but engender within ourselves that distrust which abstracts from prayer all its life and strength. All Christians have a general kind of faith; they have a belief in God's word, and a sort of trust in all His promises; but when they descend to particular points, and are required to exercise faith in all positions and relations—to believe every word of God, and confide in each of His promises, the smallest as well as the greatest—then is it that distrust and weakness of faith begin to manifest themselves. There are a multitude of prayers offered to God with something like this feeling: 'Well perhaps God will hear and answer; perhaps not. At any rate, I may as well pray; and if the answer comes, well: if not, I at least have done my duty.' Now such a feeling as this, though it be not positive infidelity, is near to it. The faith that God demands of us is that we should believe implicitly that He hears, and will answer, every prayer that is offered to Him aright.

¶ It is a commonplace to say that prayers are often so ineffective because they are so faithless and so hopeless. It is possible to pray, even in an agony of mind, for something for oneself or for a dear friend, or for guidance in some terrible perplexity, or even for deliverance from some horrible temptation, and yet, all the time, to feel an inward conviction that the prayer is useless; for there is no honest conviction that something will certainly result from it, in a word, no certain trust in Eternal Love. What we need is this definiteness of belief that love will never refuse us anything we ought to have. This is the meaning of that word 'Whatsoever.'

'*Whatsoever* ye shall ask, believing, ye shall receive,' and 'Have faith in God.'

There is an actual spiritual affinity between the soul which prays with all the fulness of believing love and Him who is Love. This is just the point where our prayers constantly break down, and this is also just the point of contact with the Infinite where those who prevail in prayer reveal such wonderful success. The most powerful dynamo will not impel its electric current along the wire in which there is a flaw which severs the connection, while on the other hand, a tiny piece of wire will complete the contact and give the electric current free passage. We cannot be in touch with the Infinite Spirit without the cable strands of faith, hope and love, and the last contains the other two.[1]

2. Another reason why our prayers are not answered is, that we evince *a practical unbelief in God's ability to grant us our requests.* In theory all Christians believe in the omniscience and omnipotence of Jehovah. Yet in practice, in the details of life, how few regard these doctrines! We are too much accustomed to measure God's ability by our ability; and if a thing appears to us improbable, or impossible, then we immediately act as if these contingencies affected God as well as ourselves, and presented the same barriers to Him as they do to us. Probabilities and possibilities respect ourselves only, and must ever govern us in our future plans and expectations. Human sagacity is tested by its ability to forecast these plans, so as to swing clear of all contingencies, and educe these expectations, unclogged by any countervailing hindrance. But such ideas as these should never gain a place in our minds when we come before God in prayer; for not only is it true, as Christ said, that 'all things are possible to him that believeth,' but it is also true, as the Bible elsewhere declares, that 'with God nothing is impossible.'

¶ Mr. Charles Inglis, the evangelist, tells us that when he first went to America, over thirty years ago, he crossed the Atlantic with the captain of a steamer who was one of the most devoted men he has ever known. When off the banks of Newfoundland the captain said: 'Mr. Inglis, the last time I crossed here, five weeks ago, one of the most extraordinary things happened, that has completely revolutionised the whole of my Christian life. Up to that time I was one of your ordinary Christians. We had a man of God on board, George Müller, of Bristol. I had been on that bridge for 22 hours, and never left it. I was startled by someone tapping me on the shoulder. It was George Müller. "Captain," he said, "I have come to tell you that I must be in Quebec on Saturday afternoon.' This was Wednesday. "It is impossible," I said. "Very well, if your ship can't take me, God will find other means to take me. I have never broken an engagement in 57 years." "I would willingly help you. How can I? I am helpless." "Let us go down to the chart room and pray."

I looked at the man of God, and I thought to myself, what lunatic asylum could the man have come from? I never heard of such a thing. "Mr. Müller," I said, "do you know how dense the fog is?" "No," he replied, "my eye is not on the density of the fog, but on the living God, who controls every circumstance of my life." He got down on his knees and prayed one of the most simple prayers. I muttered to myself: "That would suit a children's class where the children were not more than eight or nine years old." The burden of his prayer was something like this: "O Lord, if it is consistent with Thy will, please remove this fog in five minutes. Thou knowest the engagement Thou didst make for me in Quebec on Saturday. I believe it is Thy will."

When he finished I was going to pray, but he put his hand on my shoulder and told me not to pray. "First, you do not believe He will; and second, I believe He has, and there is no need whatever for you to pray about it." I looked at him, and George Müller said this: "Captain, I have known my Lord for 57 years, and there has never been a single day that I have failed to gain an audience with the King.

[1] C. D. Lampen, *Spiritual Power*, 88.

Get up, Captain, and open the door, and you will find the fog is gone.'' I got up, and the fog was gone!'[1]

3. Another great hindrance to the success of prayer arises from *the indulgence of some known sin.* The Psalmist has distinctly declared, 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.' To pray, and yet to commit wilful sin, or still to pursue a course of secret or open iniquity, is not only mocking God with lip service, but is also acting with hypocrisy, professing one thing, but doing another. A God of holiness cannot, consistently with His own character, listen to the prayer of a deliberate sinner; and accordingly He tells the wicked Israelites, through His prophet, 'When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you, and when ye make many prayers, I will not hear'; and in another passage we have the distinct assertion, 'God heareth not sinners,' that is, those who continue in known transgression. For not only is such a life repugnant to the holiness of God, it also opposes every principle of piety in our own hearts; for where sin dwells there can be found neither faith, nor humility, nor obedience, nor love to God, nor a well-founded hope, nor heavenly desires, nor a righteous life; and if these exist not in the heart, vain are all the words of the lips. A praying spirit and a sinning heart cannot dwell together; and when the life does not correspond to our devotions, then can we in nowise expect answers of peace. Hence the necessity of carefully examining ourselves when we come before the Lord, that we may approach Him with clean hands and pure hearts, knowing that the indulgence of sin, however small and insignificant it may appear to us, will assuredly expel from our souls the spirit of grace and supplication, and cut off all communion with the Holy Ghost, the Prompter of prayer; with Jesus Christ, the Intercessor; and with God, the Hearer of Prayer.

[1] *A Father's Letters to His Son*, 110.

¶ It has been said truly that 'Praying will either make a man leave off sinning, or sinning will make him leave off praying.'[1]

4. *Remissness in the performance of our Christian duty* is also another reason why our prayers are unanswered. Prayer is not the only duty that God has laid upon us; there are others equally obligatory, such as watchfulness, self-examination, reading of God's Word, giving of alms, resisting temptation, fleeing from evil; and the performance of these is so interlocked with prayer that prayer without them is as useless, for all purposes of growth in grace, as these are without prayer. We may, for example, beseech God to deliver us from evil, and to give us an increase of holiness; yet if we entertain evil thoughts in our minds, and make no efforts to grow in grace, we cannot receive an answer of peace. In the moral as in the physical world God has established a connection between means and ends; and these ends become ours only through the established means which lead to those ends. The means which God has ordained for our advancement in holiness are plainly declared to us in the Bible; and when we ask for deeper piety, for greater love, for increase of faith, and joy, and peace, and holiness, the answer will come to us through the appointed channels of watchfulness, meditation, self-examination, the diligent performance of each duty, and the careful weeding out from our hearts of the tares and the brambles of sin. No ardency or frequency of prayer can excuse us from performing all the duties enjoined upon us as Christians; the neglect of these will breed neglect of prayer, just as surely as the neglect of prayer will beget remissness in the performance of Christian duty.[1]

¶ Surely this is the lesson of Longfellow's *Legend Beautiful.*

> 'Hadst thou stayed, I must have fled!'
> That is what the Vision said.

[1] D. Williamson, *From Boyhood to Manhood*, 175.

In his chamber all alone,
Kneeling on the floor of stone,
Prayed the Monk in deep contrition
For his sins of indecision,
Prayed for greater self-denial
In temptation and in trial;
It was noonday by the dial,
And the Monk was all alone.

Suddenly, as if it lightened,
An unwonted splendour brightened
All within him and without him
In that narrow cell of stone;
And he saw the Blessed Vision
Of our Lord, with light Elysian
Like a vesture wrapped about him,
Like a garment round him thrown.

. . . . . .

In an attitude imploring,
Hands upon his bosom crossed,
Wondering, worshipping, adoring,
Knelt the Monk in rapture lost.

. . . . . .

Then amid his exaltation,
Loud the convent bell appalling,
From its belfry calling, calling,
Rang through court and corridor
With persistent iteration
He had never heard before.
It was now the appointed hour
When alike in shine or shower,
Winter's cold or summer's heat,
To the convent portals came
All the blind and halt and lame,
All the beggars of the street,
For their daily dole of food
Dealt them by the brotherhood;
And their almoner was he
Who upon his bended knee,
Rapt in silent ecstasy
Of divinest self-surrender,
Saw the Vision and the Splendour.

Deep distress and hesitation
Mingled with his adoration;
Should he go, or should he stay?
Should he leave the poor to wait
Hungry at the convent gate,
Till the Vision passed away?
Should he slight his radiant guest,
Slight this visitant celestial,
For a crowd of ragged, bestial
Beggars at the convent gate?
Would the Vision there remain?
Would the Vision come again?
Then a voice within his breast
Whispered, audible and clear
As if to the outward ear:
'Do thy duty; that is best;
Leave unto thy Lord the rest!'

Straightway to his feet he started,
And with longing look intent
On the Blessed Vision bent,
Slowly from his cell departed,
Slowly on his errand went.

. . . . . .

The errand done

Towards his cell he turned his face,
And beheld the convent bright
With a supernatural light,
Like a luminous cloud expanding
Over floor and wall and ceiling.
But he paused with awe-struck feeling
At the threshold of his door,
For the Vision still was standing
As he left it there before,
When the convent bell appalling,
From its belfry calling, calling,
Summoned him to feed the poor.
Through the long hour intervening
It had waited his return,
And he felt his bosom burn,
Comprehending all the meaning,
When the Blessed Vision said,
'Hadst thou stayed, I must have fled!'

The Strappado.

Ps. xxii. 14.—'All my bones are out of joint.'

In old and evil days, there was a diabolical instrument of torture in Spain called the strappado. And that cruel instrument was worked in this wicked way. The poor victim was first hoisted up to a great height, by means of ropes and pulleys; and then he was sud-

denly dashed to the ground, till every bone in his body was torn out of joint, and broken in pieces. And the name of the Spanish strappado has passed into the English language, because the old preachers of that day frequently employed the illustration of the strappado in their experimental sermons. As thus Goodwin: 'Now, his lusts, both of body and mind, do strappado a sinner's expectations. That is to say: his sinful imaginations hoist up his expectations of pleasure to a great height; and then, suddenly, he is let fall. For, when the sinner comes to enjoy his high expectations, they always prove themselves to be such flat and empty things, that his soul, being completely cheated, says to itself—And is this all! Thus, always, do a sinner's high expectations strappado him, till his spirit is simply dashed to pieces within him.'

So far as I know, the Spanish strappado was never imported into Scotland or England. But if we have not the scaffoldings, and the pulleys, and the ropes of that inhuman instrument among us, we have plenty of those personal experiences which are so vividly and so forcibly illustrated by those scaffoldings and pulleys, and ropes and broken bones. For we have plenty of high expectations followed by deep disappointments; plenty of great and towering ambitions, followed by great depressions; plenty of high hopes followed by low despairs; plenty seekings of great things for ourselves, followed by small and heart-starving results. Thus the Spanish strappado may have some important lessons to read to us in our own land, and in our own day.

1. To begin with: such are we, and such is this present life of ours, that lawful enough pursuits, and lawful enough pleasures, not seldom become our very worst strappados. As Goodwin says: 'Pleasures that are quite lawful to us become altogether unlawful and unsatisfying, when our affections and our imaginations are too frequently and too vehemently set upon them.' There is no need for me to put a name upon such pleasures: every man's own conscience will name them to him. The sweetest and the most allowable thing on earth has become an absolute strappado to some men.

Again, in a commercial country like ours, first the pursuit of wealth, and then the possession of wealth, strappadoes many men's souls. Many such men have lived to confess and say that when they were children they thought as children, and understood as children. They thought how happy they would be when they had attained to great wealth. They thought that when once they had a great house full of vessels of gold and silver, with horses and carriages at their doors, and troops of friends around their table, then it would be heaven upon earth with them. But when they became rich men, all those childish visions of perfect blessedness fled away. The Psalmist saw multitudes of such strappadoed men all around him in his day, and his lament over them was this: 'Verily every man, at his best estate, is altogether vanity. Surely every man walketh in a vain show: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them.' And our Lord also has this warning word to all such men: 'Thou fool! this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?' At the same time, there is no nobler pursuit on earth than the pursuit of riches, if they are pursued in order that they may be spent on God and man, on the Church of Christ, and on His poor. The higher such men climb, the nearer heaven they rise; and they shall never know disappointment nor defeat.

2. On another side of human life, what a strappado the pursuit of praise and fame is to many men among us. Take this true illustration. A friend of mine, a minister in England, became absolutely intoxicated with the ambition to write a great book on a great subject. When, after years of neglect of his pulpit and his pastorate in his devotion to his book, he was in Edinburgh and called on me, for hour after hour he poured out to me about his coming masterpiece. But when it came out, his book received one little scurvy review in one obscure London newspaper.

When I next saw my friend, I scarcely knew him,—so shrunk was he, both in body and in mind. He was like our text: he had had such a fall that all his bones were out of joint.

You will often see the same thing in preachers and public speakers. A member of Assembly, say, has laboured for weeks at a great speech, which is to make his reputation. But when he enters the advertised hall, the house is empty. And he suffers such a fall from his pride that moment that he can scarcely command his strength enough to finish the fourth part of what he had written with such labour and such expectation. The pulpit also is the sure strappado of the popularity-hunting preacher. Even if he is puffed up for a time, the time soon comes for another to arise who wholly eclipses him, till he lies with broken bones at the foot of his forgotten and forsaken pulpit. The higher his ambition hoisted him up, the deeper and the more heartbreaking is his fall.

Let these examples of strappado suffice. Every man whose eyes are open will see plenty of such examples all around him. And he is a happy man who is not such an example himself.[1]

Satisfaction and Praise.

Ps. xxii. 26.—'The meek shall eat and be satisfied; they shall praise the Lord that seek him.'

1. The Jewish ritual, and that of many other nations, provided for a festal meal following, and consisting of the material of, the sacrifice. A generation which studies comparative mythology, and spares no pains to get at the meaning underlying the barbarous worship of the rudest nations, ought to be interested in the question of the ideas that underlay and were expressed by that elaborate Jewish ritual. In the present case the signification is plain enough. That which in one aspect is a peace-offering reconciling to God, in another aspect is the nourishment and the joy of the hearts that accept it. And so the work of Jesus Christ has two distinct phases of application, according as we think of it as being offered to God or appropriated by men. In the one aspect it is our peace; in the other it is our food and our life.

If we glance for a moment at the marvellous picture of suffering and desolation in the previous portion of this Psalm, which sounds the very depths of both, we shall understand more touchingly what it is on which Christian hearts are to feed. The desolation that spoke in 'Why hast thou forsaken me?'; the consciousness of rejection and reproach, of mockery and contempt, which wailed, 'All that see me laughed me to scorn; they shoot out the lip; they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him; let him deliver him, seeing he delighteth in him'; the physical sufferings which are the very picture of crucifixion, so that the whole reads more like history than prophecy, in 'All my bones are out of joint; my strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws'; the actual passing into the darkness of the grave which is expressed in 'Thou hast brought me into the dust of death'; and even the minute correspondence, so inexplicable upon any hypothesis except that it is direct prophecy, which is found in 'They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture'—these are the viands, not without bitter herbs, that are laid on the table which Christ spreads for us. They are part of the sacrifice that reconciles to God. Offered to Him they make our peace. They are parts and elements of the food of our spirits. Appropriated and partaken of by us they make our strength and our life.

And who are they that find satisfaction? They are the meek. This character of 'meekness' is the badge of all the Lord's people. It was the character of Moses, who was said to be the meekest man that ever lived. It was the character also of Christ. So fully and so perfectly did this virtue exist in Jesus, that when the Apostle would exhort the Corinthians to peace and amity, he beseeches them 'by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.' And this character He wishes to be that of all

[1] A. Whyte, *With Mercy and with Judgment*, 35ff.

who are His followers; and therefore, He says, 'Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart.' He has made the most gracious promises to those who are of this spirit. 'The meek he will guide in judgment, and the meek he will teach his way.' He declares that He will 'save the meek' and 'the meek' He will beautify with salvation. This meekness is not the natural product of the human heart: it is one of the fruits of God's Spirit. It is described as the 'meekness of wisdom'; of wisdom based on that knowledge of self which humbles, on that knowledge of God which softens, and on that knowledge of the vanity of time and of the importance of eternity which moderates every earthly attachment. And this meekness is the best qualification for His feast of charity.

Is this our character? Are we emptied of self-flattery? Are we bringing down every high imagination to the obedience of Christ? Are we 'poor in spirit'—calling ourselves, like the great Apostle, 'the chief of sinners'? If so, of us the Lord declares, 'Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, To this man will I look, even to him that is of a poor and contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word.' In that case we are of that happy number of whom the Saviour declares, 'Blessed are the poor,' the poor in spirit, 'for theirs is the kingdom of heaven;' that is, they inherit the blessings of grace on earth, and of glory in heaven.

O Spirit, passionless, but kind,
  Is there in all the world, I cry,
Another one so base and blind,
  Another one so weak as I?
O Power, unchangeable, but just,
  Impute this one good thing to me,
I sink my spirit to the dust
  In utter dumb humility.[1]

2. After satisfaction comes praise. But here we have another description given of the Lord's people. They are not only meek, but they also 'seek the Lord.' This is not the character of the world at large. Of the world at large now we may say, as St. Paul said, 'All men seek their own, and not the things of Jesus Christ.' From Monday till Saturday they are 'seeking' their gain, their pleasures; and some of them rob God and ruin their souls by profaning even the Lord's day for business or recreation. But there is a goodly number who do seek the Lord Jesus and His salvation.

How is it that they seek the Lord? They seek Him in deep penitence for their sins. They seek Him 'carefully and with tears.' 'They ask the way to Zion,' not in idle pretence, but in sober earnestness, 'with their face turned thitherwards.' They seek Christ in His Word. They seek Christ in His sanctuary. They seek Christ at His table. They seek Christ among His acquaintances and friends; and wherever they go they say, in the language of the Song of Solomon, 'Have you seen him whom my soul loveth?'

And what is the result of their seeking? Why, the result is that which was promised: 'Ask and ye shall have: seek, and ye shall find.' They find Christ. They find His Spirit converting and renewing their souls. They find His blood cleansing and destroying their guilt. They find His righteousness purchasing and opening for them their heaven; and therefore, they not only find Christ, but like the merchantman when he has found the pearl of great price, they also rejoice in Christ. And so runs the promise, 'They that seek the Lord shall praise him.' As is well observed by Matthew Henry, 'They that are much in praying shall be much in thanksgiving.' They praise Christ for what He has done for their redemption. They sing of Him as having loved them, and given Himself for them, and as 'ordering all their steps by His word' and Spirit, till they reach that blissful place where they will praise Him as they ought.

¶ The most wonderful thing about the early Christians is their gladness of heart. They lived during a certain period under the imminent menace of cruel death. They never knew when the legionary might call at their door, to drag them to where they might be hung up as fuel for the fire. Menaced thus

[1] A. Lampman.

day and night, they lived under the frown of a gross tyrant, dreading his heavy hand. But the historians tell us this strange thing, that you could always tell a Christian in those days by his countenance. He went about with a sunny smile upon his face. His brow was clear. His eyes were bright. He confronted the most horrible of all conceivable deaths every morning, but he never changed his outlook upon life. He lived and moved in a radiant atmosphere of joy. He was as certain that life and the world were good as any Greek Hedonist had ever been. But he knew of an even better world, and whenever the call to enter that world came he was prepared.

That joy is the outward sign of a soul in harmony with itself, tuned like a harp to respond to the appeal of every noble thought or worthy deed. These men could praise life for its exceeding riches, Him who gave it for His goodness, the Redeemer who had liberated them from the tyranny of sense, and admitted them to the wealth of an inner world, and all those who in every form had helped them to see the glory and loveliness of the world.[1]

Remembering.

Ps. xxii. 27.—'All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn unto the Lord.'

They shall remember. It is as though something long forgotten had come to mind, had melted their hearts within them.

1. 'Remembering' suggests something old, something past. Are we to say, then, that Divine truth is a mere republication of what the light of nature reveals, a mere echo of what conscience has already spoken? Are we to say that the new life in which God walks with men is merely an old experience recalled and made triumphant? Surely not so. The truth that is according to godliness brings to us thoughts of God which are not our thoughts. And to each man who returns a new life opens —all things become new. And yet all this is so rooted in the old and in the past that it is well said, 'They remember and turn to the Lord.'

It is new; and yet not so new but that it has also something old in it. A man may be visited by ideas or by convictions that are wholly new, utterly strange to all his previous life. But the case before us is not altogether so. The truth which comes to man by the gospel is new, especially in what it sets forth of the mediation of Christ and the love of God our Saviour towards men. And yet men receiving it become aware that just this was at the root of many a hint that touched and troubled the mind's peace during the days of darkness. Just this lay behind many a transient conviction, many a vague and dim impression. The nature of man seemed to hold some threads of this, though too feebly and too dimly to master for themselves the truth. But when all comes out, it seems like a remembering. For you know what it is to be haunted by a dim remembrance that you cannot recall into clear light. It is gone, you say. What was it? What can it have been? Perhaps it is some scene of childhood that just hovers on the mind's horizon. Then by some sudden turn, by some accidental suggestion, the right chord is struck, and the whole idea rises vividly and certainly into view.

Something not unlike this is the experience of men when God finds them. It comes to pass in a visitation, a revelation of truth which man had not of his own; a Saviour's grace made known, a Saviour's message carried home. And yet, under this influence, all real reasons for a man's coming back to God that were present to the mind before, neglected, but real, seem now to have risen from the dead. They assume a new power, they come over the relenting heart with a new persuasiveness. It may be a new view of man and God, of duty and danger and salvation, that has become supreme. But it is a God who has old claims, often felt though not owned; and the wants that now find rest are old wants, the sense of which was often stifled, and the great benefit is something, a vision of which had crossed the

[1] A. C. Hill, *The Sword of the Lord*, 165.

mind that knew not what it was. This gospel was soliciting us all along, this Divine presence was waiting to be gracious; this was the claim we resisted, this the authority we despised. Whatever of new has come has put unspeakable meaning into all the old.

2. But this is so not only with those for whom conversion comes after years of acquaintance with the Christian creed and with the form of godliness. It holds for men as men. True, the incarnation and the redemption of Christ our Lord, and the great salvation built on these, come in as something great and new following on man's woeful fall. Yes; but the God who is revealed in all this, who reaches us through all these, and in Christ becomes ours, is the very God for whom man was made. This is the meaning of man. There is not one whole capacity of affection of the heart but can bear its witness to Him. Every want which redemption supplies refers us back to an original relation between God and us, the record of which can never be worn out of God's creature, man. And the blessedness which redemption brings is for the heart of man, as man was planned and made; and the path it opens for us is such a path as human feet were made to walk in. Men find here something that is, in a strange, deep sense, their own. It comes home to them like a remembering.

Returning to God, men come to a land where they had not been, for they were without God and without hope. But they do not come altogether to a strange and foreign shore. Something tells them they were made for this. To be here with God is the proper region; to converse here with God is the fitting exercise of a nature like ours. From this we were exiles by reason of sin. But the country from which we are exiled surely is in some deep sense our own country—our native land. So it comes over us like home—like our Father's house. We remember and turn. Hence, there may be and shall be such a mutual understanding about it—such a consent of a returning world. For when the new life opens its vision to men, it recalls what was common to mankind as man was made—a relation to God, a fellowship with God, for the want of which man is desolate, in the finding of which man is restored. It is the lost past of all of us come back again with something better added—the garden come again and the river that watered the garden, and the tree of life and the God that walks in the garden, only all with a wealth of blessing which that first garden never knew.[1]

All the World.

Ps. xxii. 27.—'All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord.'

THERE are three theories of the future of Christianity which have been held by Christians.

1. There are those who say that we are never to look for a glorious future to the Church on earth. There is to be no such thing as a universal spread of the gospel. The Church is not to wax, but to wane. The Kingdom of Heaven has nothing to do with the world but to condemn it. It exists on earth to save the few out of the wreck, and the rest go, as was ordained, to perdition. The utmost we can hope to do is to rescue an elect soul here and there from the general catastrophe, leaving the nations to perish and the mass of mankind to become castaways. That view, though it bases itself on some facts which cannot be disputed, and also on some Scripture passages which might conceivably be interpreted in its favour, is now rightly rejected as wholly inconsistent with the general tenor of the gospel, with the character of the God of grace, and with the promises of Holy Scripture.

2. There is another view, of which one hears very little in these days, though it was the doctrine of the early Church, and though it may ground itself much more securely on the words of the New Testament—both in the

[1] R. Rainy.

Gospels and in the Epistles. It is that the power of good and the power of evil will alike increase. 'Let both grow together until the harvest' is the word of our Lord. St. Augustine taught that, however the leaven of the gospel may spread, the power of evil and the malignity of evil will advance. It is all contained in one dread word seldom spoken now—the word anti-Christ. The thought of anti-Christ was prominent in the early Church, even in the instruction given to catechumens. When instructed in the doctrine of the Second Advent of our Lord without sin unto salvation, pupils were taught that the ruthless, murderous, merciless, crafty spirit of anti-Christ would grow, and before the end seem to prevail. The Second Advent would come after the struggle, in which all the past sufferings of the Church would be far excelled, in which a persecution against the saints of God, such as had not been from the beginning, would sift the very elect. The saints would wrestle with Satan in his own person, in a time of trouble such as had not been, in a time when iniquity would abound and the love of many would wax cold. In this Armageddon of the earth, the greatest of all the great conflicts which God had permitted to befall His Church, there would be a falling away, and so terrible would be the trial that, except these days should be shortened, no flesh should be saved; but for the elect's sake the days should be shortened. In that dark time the daily sacrifice would be taken away, words which were interpreted to mean the forcible cessation of all religious worship. St. Augustine doubted whether baptism would be administered during that period. Further, taking the words of our Lord that the abomination that maketh desolate should be set up in the holy place, it was foretold that some terrible form of blasphemy, with rites of devil-worship, would be substituted for the service of Christ in the churches. The power seemingly victorious would work miracles, overwhelming the imagination with signs that might deceive the very elect. The spirit of anti-Christ has never been quite dormant in the world. The Emperor Julian was taken as in a degree typical of the anti-Christ who was to come. In the French Revolution there were many of the works of anti-Christ, and we may freely admit that there are powers existing, and not so very far away, which might yet find the work of anti-Christ congenial. So then, in the view of the early Church, the Kingdom of Christ would grow steadily; the kingdom of Satan would also grow steadily. The two hostile powers would come into conflict in a battle in which the Church would seem to tremble and waver. Then Christ Himself would appear and consume the anti-Christ by the breath of His mouth, and destroy him by the brightness of His coming.

3. There is, thirdly, the theory of hope, the theory that in manifold ways, some apparent and some hidden, the Kingdom of God keeps coming, and will come. There is the faith that the armies of the aliens, in spite of all we see, are being beaten back, and that in the end evil will gradually die out of the living world and be merged in the good. The solemn warnings of Scripture and the stern facts of life are not ignored. The words of our Lord, so plain, so unmistakable, are not to be forgotten. 'The enemy that soweth them is the devil.' Our fight is not with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers, with Satanic hosts on which no impression is made by what is called civilization, or social reform, or intellectual enlightenment. But the promises look to the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom, to the flowing of all nations to the mountain of the Lord's House, to the day when they shall not hurt or destroy in all God's holy mountain, when the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. We are not to be surprised, not to be disheartened, at the strength and inveterate enmity of the hostile forces. We have been forewarned, and we are not to be in needless fear, not to be afraid where no fear is. Greater is He that is for us than all they that are against us. The day of the latter rain, the Second Pentecost, is to precede the coming of our Saviour,

a blessed time, when the prophecies will be seen in a new light. 'And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of Hosts: I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord.' 'Those beautiful questioning words of Isaiah about the Gentiles often occur to me,' says one, ' "Who are these that fly as doves to their windows?"—a flock of doves speeding to their homes, their ark of refuge. Noah's one dove, like the solitary Jewish Church, took refuge there from the wild waste of waters. But all kindreds, peoples, tongues, and nations shall fly to their stronghold in the latter times, their wings covered with silver and their feathers with yellow gold, white and lovely, though they have lien among the pots.' The words of the text are from the Psalm which many conjecture was used as a soliloquy by our Lord when He was expiring on the Cross. Well might it have been so, well might He recall the music of the promise in the hour when He was bruising Satan under His nailed feet.

¶ Christ's kingdom is destined to abolish the kingdoms of the earth. Each day, with every soul that is converted, its power is extended because it has acquired another citizen, snatched from the kingdoms of the earth. When all men shall have become virtuous; when we shall all love our fellow-men as fathers love their children; when we shall love even our enemies (if, indeed, enemies then still exist); when no one shall seek to accumulate riches, and instead of taking from others each one shall give bread to him who is hungry, and a cloak to him who is cold; what, in that hour, will become of the kingdoms of the earth? What need of soldiers when no one seeks to extend his own territory at the expense of his neighbour? What need of judges when transformed humanity shall have ceased to know what crime is? What need of kings when his own conscience is become a law unto every man, and there are no longer armies to command and judges to appoint? What need of money and of taxation when every man is sure of his bread and satisfied with it, and there are no wages to be paid either to soldiers or to servants? When the hearts of all shall have altered, those props we call society, country, and justice will melt away like the dreams of a troubled night. The word of Christ needs no money, no armies to support it, and when it shall have become the guiding principle in every man, and for all time, all that now binds and blinds humanity—force that is sinful but necessary, and the wicked glory of war—will be swept away as are the mists of morning by the strength of the sun and the rush of the wind. The Kingdom of Heaven that is one will supplant the kingdoms of the earth that are many. There will no longer be kings and subjects, masters and slaves, rich and poor, sanctimonious sinners and sinners who are cynical. There will no longer be sinners who are crushed by their shame and virtuous beings who glory in their moral superiority, prisoners and men who go free. God's sun will shine on all alike. The citizens of His kingdom will form one family, and the gates of Heaven will again be thrown open to the sons of Adam, who will have become as gods.[1]

[1] Giovanni Papini, *The Story of Christ*, 51.

THE SHEPHERD PSALM.

Ps. xxiii.

1. THERE is one element in which the Old Testament transcends the New. Were it not for the Old Testament, we should be without those spiritual songs which supply us with the fittest speech in which to address the eternal God. Here we need higher speech than we ourselves can frame. Man, if he is to know the awed and reverent hour of worship, must have nobler words than his poor thought can make, expressions of higher emotion than his tame spirit can feel. There is wondrous power in song to consecrate and ennoble. 'Let me make the songs of a people, and I care not who makes their laws,' said Fletcher of Saltoun, and he said well. To make the songs is to shape those emotions, fancies, ideals, ends that are the highest because the most nobly embodied law enshrined in the heart. The man who can give to the spirit of a people its highest tone, its deepest conviction, its loftiest expression, will determine its truest purpose and noblest endeavours.

¶ There are men who visit the land I best know and most love, and they admire its beauty—the silvery Tweed flowing between its storied banks, past its mouldering monasteries, and through fields where almost every footstep wakes echoes of feud and foray, love and death; they admire, too, its mountains clothed with the purple heather, and its streams where the mottled trout invite the angler to come and ply his gentle craft, and they think its stately lochs and rivers beautiful to the eye and to the imagination, as they sleep or dance in their radiant summer beauty. But for a man to know and feel the meaning of the land he must know its songs, and how they consecrate its streams and make its lone glens and cairns significant of days that are past, and deeds of heroism that were not achieved in vain. Only as the living imagination quickened by the living heart transfigures nature does nature become significant. And if the poetry that idealizes be so necessary to the interpretation and revelation of a land, then ere man can feel the full meaning that even for himself alone lives in the name of God, he must see Him, as it were, steeped in poetry, penetrated and transfigured by song, translated into speech higher than the speech of common day, full of the mystic passion that seeks the Eternal, and loves to lose our temporal being in Him.[1]

2. The Psalter is the book of song that gives to the dumb spirit speech fit for the presence of God. It is the poetry that idealizes God for the spirit. And what it does for our sense of God it does also for our feeling of man in relation to Him. These Psalms come to us steeped in loved memories. The words that tell us of God as our Shepherd raise the tender image of the mother who first taught us so to think and speak of Him; and they make us feel in the direct succession of the holy spirits from whom we received our being and our faith. Think how wondrous has been the life of a Psalm like the Twenty-third, and how impossible it were to write its history! Men who learned to use it in childhood have found it in age change the 'shadow feared of man' into the translucent veil of a gracious immortality. By its words penitents have been lifted out of despondency and despair into joyous peace. Thousands of years have passed since it first rose from the heart of the man who made it. For centuries it was sung in old Judæa by Hebrew tongues. Captives who sat by the rivers of Babel, and wept as they remembered Zion, dried their tears and became hopeful as they sang the Lord's song in the strange land, though their joy turned to sadness when their captors demanded that the voice of piety be changed into the sounds of mirth. Men in the Maccabean wars, who trusted their heroic leaders and so became

[1] A. M. Fairbairn, *Christ in the Centuries*, 72.

heroes themselves, as they watched by the river of Zion that made glad the city of their God, came to feel that they could meet the might of the world by a greater might, and so took comfort in disaster and grew strong for victory as they sang of Jehovah who guided and gave rest. Shepherds abiding in the fields and keeping watch over their flocks by night, as they heard sweet and rhythmic speech of promise and good will fall from heaven may well have broken into far-sounding and ascending song in praise of Him who fed Joseph like a flock, gathered the lambs with His arm, carried them in His bosom, and gently led those that were with young. Men who had seen the Good Shepherd lay down His life for the sheep, and who loved to meet in Roman catacombs, or crowded cities, or still and desert places, that they might remember Him, grew happy and cheerful and holy as they sang to 'the Lord our Shepherd.' And, since then, who can tell the thousands who, seeking the clearer light in dark ages, or in days of stress and trouble and persecution, such as our fathers knew, when faithful men were hunted on moors, and had to hide in wild glens and caves of the earth, or to endure the dungeon, have taken courage and grown peaceful by the help of this sweet song?

¶ The Book of Psalms is all men's book, the book of all experiences, all aspirations, baffle-ments, sorrows, despairs, sins, forgiveness and eternal hope. The old Rabbinic legend says that above David's bed there hung a harp, and as the midnight breezes sighed through the strings they made such music that the poet could do no other than rise and wed immortal words to the mystic, heavenly strains until the rosy dawn of day. The plain prose of that is that through the long, long night of man's earthly pilgrimage our human hearts echo the Divine music of the Psalms. All the literature of the world is open to us; no convention drives us to the Bible. All the poetry of all the ages is ours; saints and seers, philosophers and poets, the children of genius of all ages and countries, are ours. Yet in the crucial experiences of our lives, when the great deeps of our nature are plumbed, when we are overwhelmed by some tragic sorrow, or shaken by a passion of penitence in the presence of confessed iniquity, when we have passed through the swelling waters of affliction, and from them have come forth to walk in solemn loneliness the silent hills of God, our sighs, our sorrows and our fears, our gladness, thanksgiving, and unshakable faith, find their best expression in some great, simple line from some Psalm that our mothers loved! [1]

¶ I suppose that hardly any of the ancient gems which have come down to modern times have been worn through generation after generation ever since they left the hand of the artist who cut and engraved them; they have been dug up from the ruins of ancient cities after they had been buried for many centuries. Articles of ancient domestic use would have been worn out long ago if they had continued in use ever since they were originally made; they too have been discovered in ancient ruins, and since their discovery have been carefully preserved in museums. And the temples, palaces, tombs which are as ancient as the Psalms are temples in which for many centuries no sacrifice has been offered; palaces in which for many centuries no king has reigned; tombs to which for many centuries no mourners have carried their dead. There are huge rents in the massive walls; the roofs have fallen in; they have been desolate and forsaken for generations. This Psalm, on the other hand, has been in daily use for more than two thousand years. It has been a lamp, with its light never extinguished, which has cheered and guided through their mortal troubles countless multitudes of men in many lands; it has been an ornament of beauty which has given to their lives grace and dignity; it has been a home in which they have lived happily and peacefully, finding shelter in it from rain, and snow, and rough winds. A king may have written it, but it has passed into the possession of millions of common people like ourselves. It has become the expression of the experience, not of a solitary saint, but of a countless multitude of saints. As I listen to it, I think

[1] C. F. Aked.

I hear the chant of men of every kindred, and tribe, and tongue, and of every age since the Psalm was written, every new generation taking up the strain from its predecessor, and all of them declaring that the Lord was their Shepherd, that He made them lie down in green pastures, led them beside the still waters, guided them in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. We, too, may be of good hope. What God has been to so great a multitude of men He will be to us.[1]

3. This is a poet's Psalm. It suggested to David's Son and Lord His most tender metaphor, and so to the rest of the New Testament writers much of the imagery of their pages; for example, to the writer to the Hebrews the 'great shepherd of the sheep,' and to St. John the Divine the Lamb that shall lead us 'unto living fountains of waters.' From these it passed into Christian art, from the young strong shepherds of the Catacombs to the symbols of the *Agnus Dei* on the latest altars, to the newest of bishop's crooks, and into Christian literature from the early Shepherd down to the children's hymns. Most people learn it, with the Lord's Prayer, at their mother's knees, as Ruskin did. It is the first of the seven 'Consolitorie Psalms,' as Sir Richard Baker (1568-1645) calls them (xxiii, xxvii, xxx, xxxiv, lxxxiv, ciii, and cxvi). He had been high sheriff of Oxford and Sir Henry Wotton's Oxford friend, yet he wrote his chronicle in the Fleet prison for debtors, where he spent the last ten years of his life, and found the consolation he speaks about. It was the last utterance of Edward Irving (1834), who repeated it in Hebrew.

Four well-known versions of the Psalm stand out pre-eminent from the rest. George Herbert's (1593-1633) version, 'The God of Love my Shepherd is,' which was read by King Charles in prison, comes in his book *The Temple*. John Byron (1692-1763), Jacobite, physician, shorthand teacher, poet, and mystic, wrote the version, 'The Lord is my Shepherd, His goodness my song.' Joseph Addison (1672-1719), the Oxford scholar and prince of English essayists, published in *The Spectator* his statelier version, 'The Lord my pasture shall prepare.' Sir Henry William Baker (1821-1877), of Trinity College, Cambridge, and Vicar of Monklands, the promoter and editor of *Hymns Ancient and Modern,* wrote 'The King of Love my Shepherd is,' and died repeating the verse beginning 'Perverse and foolish oft I strayed.' Two other memorable versions are that of Sir Philip Sidney and his sister the Countess of Pembroke, and the still more bold and poetic version by Francis Davidson (1602), beginning, 'God, who the universe, doth hold in His fold.' The allusions to the Psalm among the poets are too countless even to summarize.[1]

[1] R. W. Dale.

I.

THE AUTHOR AND HIS EXPERIENCE.

1. This is said to be 'A Psalm of David,' but the man who wrote the Psalm did not write the superscription. It was added by some later hand, the scribe or editor who arranged the Psalter.

If David did not write it, it was written by some obscure saint whose name has been forgotten; and this might seem to draw the Psalm nearer to some of us, and to give us a stronger claim to all its disclosures concerning the blessedness of a life in God's keeping. There are some moods in which we may feel that David might well have received assurances that he was under the immediate care and guidance of the Eternal, but that it does not follow that we may rely on the same guidance and the same care. David had great and exceptional natural powers; great and exceptional spiritual endowments; and he had been Divinely appointed to great and exceptional tasks in working out the Divine thoughts concerning mankind. Such a man might have very good reasons for saying, 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want . . . He guideth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.'

[1] C. L. Marson, *The Psalms at Work*, 55.

A king, a poet, a ruler of the elect race which had been entrusted with a revelation of God that was to be a blessing to all nations, a man of such natural splendour and force that the story of his virtues and his crimes, his glory and his shame, has descended through nearly three thousand years, and has spread over the whole world—such a man might well believe that he had the support, and protection, and guidance of God. But for a lamp-manufacturer in Birmingham to believe it, or the manager of a colliery in Yorkshire, or a mill-owner in Bolton, or an ironmaster in South Staffordshire is a very different matter. David, the anointed King of the Jews, it might have been true of him; he was a very exceptional person; but is it true of drapers in Regent Street, of tea merchants and sugar merchants in the neighbourhood of Mincing Lane? May a village blacksmith take the Psalm and use it for himself, or a farm labourer in Norfolk, or a 'boundary-rider' in New South Wales, or a fitter in the engine works at Crewe, or a country doctor, or the master of a public elementary school, or a clerk, or an accountant, or a dressmaker? If it became certain that the Psalm was not written by David, but by some unknown person more like ourselves, would not some of us have more courage to make all its expressions of confidence in God our own. If the traditional authorship had to be given up we should gain something though we should lose much.

2. But if this Psalm, which has been attributed to David for more than two thousand years at least, was really written by some unknown saint a great deal would certainly be lost. For David is a man whose character and experience have an enduring moral and religious interest; everything that throws light on his sorrows and his joys, his faith, his fears, his sins, and his repentance, is of great value; and the Twenty-third Psalm, if he wrote it, contains a very striking illustration of the depth and strength of his personal trust in God. It helps to make one part of David's life real and vivid to us.

3. If it has been rightly attributed to David, at what time of life and after what experiences was it written? Some say in youth, some in manhood or even old age.

(1) 'If,' says Principal Fairbairn,[1] 'this Psalm is David's, it belongs to the period when the future monarch was still the shepherd. Nature and life were to him parables, which he interpreted into the revelations of God. He saw in his own shepherd's thoughtfulness for his flock and care for the individual lambs a type of God's providence for man. As his sheep lay and fed on the green pastures, or wandered in the sultry days of summer beside the still waters, he thought of himself held in the hands of God. As he went watchful into some dark valley, prepared to defend his lambs against the lions or bears that lodged amid the crags and trees of its frowning sides, he found himself treading the way down to death, and felt that, guarded by the rod and staff of God, he would fear no evil. And then, as he thought of the rest beyond the dark valley, there came into his mind the image of a pleasant land and a kindly host, who had just welcomed a hungry, footsore, and dusty traveller, and washed his feet, anointed his head, and set before him a full and rich repast; and in all this he saw the picture of his own soul, wearied but saved, entering into the house of God to abide in blessedness for ever. Surely that was to the Psalmist a happy prospect. A life here spent in green and watered places under the guardian care of God; a life hereafter passed in His house amid fulness of joy and peace for evermore; and between, the valley of death, lying indeed in sable shadow, but the presence of God making light about his spirit, and the rod and staff of God giving to his soul quietness and assurance.'

(2) On the other hand, to Dr. Maclaren[2] 'it sounds as if it were the work of his later years. There is a fullness of experience about it, and a tone of subdued, quiet confidence which speaks of a heart mellowed by years, and of a faith made sober by many a trial.

[1] *Christ in the Centuries*, 79.
[2] *Expositions*, Psalms i-xlix, 95.

A young man would not write so calmly, and a life which was just opening would not afford material for such a record of God's guardianship in all changing circumstances.'

And Dr. McFadyen is of the same opinion :[1] 'The singer of this sweet song is one who has travelled far on life's way, and his path has not always been bright or smooth. He knows that there are sunny nooks and corners, that life is not all a wilderness, but that there are bright patches of green where for a brief noontide hour one may lie down and be happy. He knows that its thirst is not such as cannot be slaked, for a gracious Providence has caused the waters to bubble up and run through it, and that by the banks of its restful waters a man may quench that thirst and rest his weariness awhile. But he knows, too, that life is not all pastures of greenness and waters of rest; for has he not had to tread many a dark way, and walk through ravines where the sun never shone, and in whose gloomy recesses there lurked dangers from robbers and beasts? Life has been a checkered experience, but throughout it all one thing has been very real to him: he has always been sure of God. In his own eyes, he is nothing but a poor, silly sheep, hungering for the green and beautiful pastures, thirsting for the refreshing waters, and prone to walk upon devious paths of his own; but as the sheep were guided and defended by the human shepherd, so was he guided and defended by that Shepherd Divine, whose care was unceasing, and whose mighty love would be with him, as he felt, "throughout the length of days." He "brings the soul back," brings it home, leads it from its crooked paths, and sets it upon his own "straight paths," paths which lead straight to the peace of the fold; and to all this He is pledged by His own name. The sheep can count upon the Shepherd. He must be true to them, for He must be true to Himself. He does it all "for his own name's sake." '

[1] *The City with Foundations*, 201.

II.

THE CHARACTER OF THE PSALM.

THIS Psalm breathes throughout a spirit of the calmest and most assured trust in God: it speaks of a peace so deep, a serenity so profound, that even the thought of the shadow of death cannot trouble it. Perhaps there is no Psalm in which the absence of all doubt, misgiving, fear, anxiety, is so remarkable; and certainly no image could have been devised more beautifully descriptive of rest, and safety, and trustful happiness than that of the sheep lying down in the deep, rich, meadow-grass beside the living stream, under the care of a tender and watchful shepherd. This feeling of confidence is expressed in three different ways: first, 'I cannot (or, shall not) want'; next, 'I will fear no evil'; lastly, 'I will dwell in the house of Jehovah for ever.'

1. It is a Psalm of personal experience. Whether the Psalmist sang it first of the Church of God as a whole or of the individual, the Church herself has sung it, through all generations, of the individual. By the natural progress of religion from the universal to the particular; by the authority of the Lord Jesus, who calls men singly to the Father, and one by one assures them of God's Providence, Grace and Glory; by the millions who have taken Him at His word, and every man of them in the loneliness of temptation and duty and death proved His promise—we also in our turn dare to believe that this Psalm is a Psalm for the individual. The Lord is *my* shepherd; He maketh *me* to lie down: He leadeth *me:* He restoreth *my* soul.

¶ This is for all of us the first grand necessity—to know God for ourselves, to get into touch with the Infinite, to be in conscious correspondence with the Supreme. Religion consists in the adjustment and fulfilment of personal relations with a personal God. Until we have thus realized Him to our individual consciousness, we may have a creed, but we have not religion. Wherever we finish, this is where we must all begin.

Men separated from each other by the

widest extremes of theological thought agree in this. Here, for example, is Principal Fairbairn, one of the foremost leaders of Nonconformist thought, declaring: 'Were it possible to reduce a pious soul to the consciousness of only two beings—first and pre-eminently of God, next and feebly of self—then it were possible to endow that soul with the supremest happiness possible to a creature; and the more nearly any man approaches to that consciousness the more blessed will he be.'

Then, yonder is Cardinal Newman, in his famous *Apologia*, affirming the selfsame truth when he says: 'From a very early age I have rested in the thought of two and two only supreme and luminously self-evident beings—myself and my Creator.'

Lovers of Tennyson will know how clear a note the poet struck when touching on this theme. Let his 'De Profundis' be studied in the light of the following from Mr. Wilfred Ward's account of the manner in which Lord Tennyson, almost at the last, read to him this great poem as his deepest confession of faith: He raised his eyes from the book at the seventh line and looked for a moment at his hearer with an indescribable expression of awe before he uttered the word 'Spirit'—'out of the deep—Spirit—out of the deep.' When he had finished the second 'Greeting' he was trembling much. Then he read the prayer—a prayer, he had told me, of self-prostration before the Infinite. I think he intended it as a contrast with the analytical and reflective character of the rest. It is an outpouring of the simplest and most intense self-abandonment to the Creator, an acknowledgment, when all has been thought and said, with such insight and beauty, that our best thoughts and words are as nothing in the Great Presence.

Hallowed be Thy name—Halleluiah!
Infinite Ideality!
Immeasurable Reality!
Infinite Personality!
Hallowed be Thy name—Halleluiah!

We feel we are nothing—for all is Thou and in Thee;
We feel we are something—*that* also has come from Thee;
We know we are nothing—but Thou wilt help us to be.
Hallowed be Thy name—Halleluiah!

The same personal note rings out with clarion clearness when 'From the great deep to the great deep he goes,' chanting his own death-song:

I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crost the bar.

Robert Browning also, in 'Pauline,' discovers and reveals that religion in its last analysis resolves itself into the fulfilment of private and personal relations with God:

My God, my God, let me for once look on thee
As though nought else existed, we alone!
And as creation crumbles, my soul's spark
Expands till I can say,—even from myself
I need thee and I feel thee and I love thee.[1]

2. Its God is a God who makes Himself known. It is full of the sense that life is haunted by a presence. We may be travelling through the great and terrible wilderness; but its terrors vanish for him who can say, '*Thou* art with *me*.' We are indeed silly sheep, but not shepherdless. Here and there, as we look across our life, we see green and happy spots where we were refreshed, renewed, restored. In our best moments we know that it was the good Shepherd who took us there, and we might have been there far oftener had we given up our lives to His leading and guiding; for the paths on which He leads us are not crooked but straight. And if we are willing to follow, He is pledged to guide us, for His own name's sake. He must be true to His sheep as to Himself.

The modern view of the universe has created a new problem for faith. While enhancing our appreciation of Jehovah's majesty and power, it tends to weaken our assurance of His sympathetic concern for the single lives of men. The telescope has dis-

[1] H. Howard, *The Shepherd Psalm*, 115.

closed to our view a universe enormously vaster than that which the ancients knew. God has more worlds to care for than they supposed He had. 'The wheel of Nature' is a bigger thing to turn, and a more complicated machine to lubricate, than they had thought. Moreover, the study of physical phenomena has wrought in us a deeper conviction of the uniformity of Nature's processes. Through all her movements and changes we now behold the reign of one all-pervading, all-controlling system of law.

With mind intent upon these facts, it is easy to drop from the soul the sense of God's personal presence and permit the thought of His special providence to fade from our minds. To many it seems as if science has stolen away the Lord and they know not where it has laid Him. For this reason—because of this new burden added to faith's task—we of to-day have special need to fortify our hearts with the strong assurance of spiritually visioned men to whom the presence and companionship of God was the most vivid reality of their lives. The confession of faith which such men give to the world is valid, not merely for their own times, but for all times. They were specialists in the things of the spirit, experts in 'the practice of the presence of God,' and the findings of their experience have permanent significance for mankind. They build a trellis upon which the faith of succeeding generations may climb and lean and ripen.

Among all the declarations of human confidence in the personalizing care of God there is not another which can rival this in strength, simplicity, warmth and beauty. It is so buoyant, so glad, so assured, so calm in its conviction of God's watchful, loving care, that it answers the most anxious questionings of the human heart. As we read it, the burdening thoughts of far-flung space and circling worlds and unbending laws roll from our souls, and God seems near to our little lives in attentive interest and sympathetic concern. At its magic touch the universe seems to contract to a sanctuary where God and the soul meet each other in an intimacy and a privacy that shut all else outside. The Psalm does not argue about God's personality or His nearness or His care; it simply sings out the gladness of one life that God had shepherded. 'Like some sweet, beguiling melody,' it steals into the reader's heart and wraps about it the sense of a Divine presence and encompassment.

III.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE PSALM.

1. The Psalm has usually been divided into two parts. The first four verses contain the figure of a shepherd and his sheep; the remaining two verses change the figure into that of a host with his guest. 'The Lord is my shepherd' is the note of the first part. 'Thou preparest a table before me' introduces the second. In the first part of the Psalm God was the shepherd, and man a sheep. But man is more than a sheep. He who can look up into the face of God and say '*Thou* art with *me*' is God's friend; and whether the figure of God as shepherd be retained in the second half of the Psalm or no, at any rate the Psalmist describes himself in more human and less pastoral terms.

The relationship into which God brings His people is still nearer, tenderer, more loving than that of shepherd and sheep, and the fellowship more perfect. Sheep are not capable, except in an outward way, of having fellowship with the shepherd; his own three years' child is more to him in this respect than his whole flock; but believing men are capable of fellowship with God, of walking with Him, knowing His love, understanding His thoughts, learning His secret, sharing His joy, being made partakers of His holiness. The higher fellowship, under a new figure, comes into view now. Jehovah spreads a table before us; anoints our head as with fresh oil; fills our cup to overflowing; receives us not as guests merely, but to dwell in His house for ever.

¶ As I understand the Psalm there is a very wonderful and glorious advance in the thought here. I am not merely one of the sheep of His pasture now, but one of the inmates of His house. He brings me very near to Him-

self; admits me, yea, welcomes me into the inner circle of communion; not only supplies my wants, and guides me in the way, and restores my weary spirit, and gathers me under His defence, and keeps me from all ill; but receives me to a place at His table with love and honour: and this not merely as a guest who by-and-by goes away, but as a dweller in His house, to go no more out. It is one of the nearest approaches that the Old Testament makes to the revelation of the sonship of believers.[1]

2. But, says Principal Sir G. A. Smith, 'the break at verse 4 is only in appearance. The last two verses are as pastoral as the first four.'

The table spread, the anointing, and the full cup are still part of the privileges of the sheep. This view of the figure is wrought out in detail by J. D. Freeman in *Life on the Uplands*[2]: The affectionate solicitude of the shepherd now finds expression in a singularly beautiful and beneficent ministry. He remembers how long the day has been; how hot and dusty the road; how exhausting to the sheep the excitements and struggles of the way. Hence he prepares a special benediction to be bestowed at the moment of their retirement to the fold. Yonder comes a sheep whose head is drooping low. Its slow, uncertain movements speak of utter weariness. Its strength is almost spent. With languid wistfulness the sheep lifts up its tired, dust-stained face in answer to the shepherd's call, and lo! it receives an anointing, fragrant and refreshing. For the shepherd, quick to note the signs of exhaustion, fills the hollow of his hand with olive oil from the horn at his side, and gently bathes the face now gratefully uplifted to him. And when this is done, he extends the cup filled from the well by the fold, that the thirsty one may drink.

¶ W. A. Knight, in his *Song of our Syrian Guest*[3], introduces a native Syrian speaking in this way:

'Thou preparest a table before me—in the presence of mine enemies.'

In the same hushed voice in which he quoted these words he added:

'Ah, to think that the shepherd's highest skill and heroism should be lost from view as the Psalm begins to sing of it, and only an indoor banquet thought of!'

Again he sat in silence a moment. Then he said:

'There is no higher task of the shepherd in my country than to go from time to time to study places and examine the grass, and find a good and safe feeding-place for his sheep. All his skill, and often great heroism, are called for. There are many poisonous plants in the grass, and the shepherd must find and avoid them. A cousin of mine once lost three hundred sheep by a mistake in this hard task.

Then there are vipers' holes, and the reptiles bite the noses of the sheep if they be not driven away. The shepherd must burn the fat of hogs at the holes to do this. And round the feeding-ground which the shepherd thus prepares, in holes and caves in the hillsides, there are jackals, wolves, hyenas, and tigers, too, and the bravery and skill of the shepherd are at the highest point in closing up these dens with stones, or slaying the wild beasts with his long-bladed knife. Of nothing do you hear shepherds boasting more proudly than of their achievements in this part of their care of flocks. And now!' he exclaimed with a beaming countenance and suppressed feeling, as if pleading for recognition of the lone shepherd's bravest action of devotion to his sheep, 'and now do you see the shepherd figure in that quaint line, "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies"?'

¶ There are several words to express a meal, or, as it is translated, 'table.' But one of them has a special significance. 'Souffra' is a meal that consists of a fine variety of dishes, the best the host can supply, and this word is used to signify a meal for guests or for transient visitors, but not for permanent inhabitants. It has the same root as 'jour-

[1] J. Culross, *God's Shepherd Care*, 125.
[2] P. 101.
[3] P. 17.

ney'—*suffur*. The flocks are transient guests on the mountain pastures, where a meal, of a variety of fragrant and aromatic herbs, grasses, and flowers, is spread before them in the presence of their enemies. Men are also but transient guests in this world, in which God has prepared a most abundant table, *souffra, for* them.[1]

IV.

THE CONTENTS OF THE PSALM.

'THE Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.' There is the opening strain of music: in that chord is sounded the keynote which is never lost till the plaintive melody dies away at the song's end. All that follows is that thought put in varying light.

1. *Rest.*—'He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.' The shepherd is early astir. He has his flock forth from the fold and well out upon the feeding ground, while yet

> Morning's at seven,
> The hill-side's dew-pearl'd.

This is the ideal feeding time. The flock is fresh, its hunger is keen, and the pasture is moist and sweet. A good shepherd always provides a full feed early in the day. It is in consequence of their hearty feeding that the sheep 'lie down.' Not in weariness, but in contentment, do they stretch themselves upon the green. The picture here is not one of exhaustion, but of satisfaction. The recumbence of the flock proclaims the abundance of the pasture. Tired sheep would be better in a fold than in a field. They would rather sleep than eat. To them a bank of moss in the cool shadow of a rock would be more welcome than any pastures, however green. Clearly, it is the fullness of the flock that is suggested here. Cropping the sweet grasses, they quickly feed to satisfaction and lie down content.

[1] A. F. Mamreov, *A Day with the Good Shepherd*, 49.

¶ 'He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.' Think how beautiful and suggestive the 'green' is. 'Green pastures.' We hardly, indeed, know the gratefulness of greenery, for it is everywhere in this country, and we need never feel its want. Men come out of the East and out of the West to this land of rich green grass and of turf centuries old, and soft underfoot, and as they walk over it and look at it with eyes full of pleasure, they ask wondering, How came it to be? Familiarity has made us so insensible to its beauty that we do not hunger after it, in eye and foot and soul, as does the traveller of the desert or the voyager of the sea. But away in the land where this Psalm was written, green was so grateful because so rare. The hot sun high overhead, the blistering sand underfoot, and the dry river-bed by the wayside, made the shepherd suffer with his weary flock; and they panted together and in sympathy for the soft, shady greenery and the grateful brook. And into pleasant and sheltered places God leads the man who trusts in Him. 'He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.'[1]

2. *Refreshment.*—Between ten and eleven o'clock in the forenoon the shepherd calls his flock together and leads them to the nearest well, or stream, or spring, for their daily drink of water. No shepherd in Palestine would ever keep his flock twenty-four hours without such supply. During the winter or rainy season torrents and brooks and streams are plentiful, but through the summer and autumn the great majority of these run dry. For no rain falls in Palestine between the end of April and the last of October, though the dews are heavy at night. Consequently from time immemorial the natives have dug wells and built enormous cisterns underground to hold a sufficient supply for the needs of the dry season.

Around the stone curbs of wells and of cisterns there are always several large troughs hewn out of solid rock. Attached to his broad leathern girdle the shepherd carries a leathern bucket and a rope with which he draws up the water and fills the troughs.

[1] A. M. Fairbairn, *Christ in the Centuries*, 87.

¶ It is these 'waters of quietness' that refresh the spirit and reinforce us on the moral side, and without them we must faint and flag. Meditation is threatening to become a lost art, and certainly it looks as if we had but little time and less inclination for quiet thoughts of God and things unseen. The gospel of work is all very well, but it must be so held as not to exclude or overbalance the complementary gospel of rest. Our fathers would have regarded it as atheism of the worst sort to leave no room for God in the programme of their day, no vacant spaces cleared about the soul in which the shining ones might come and go between them and the great unseen. And if our leaf is not to wither amid the sultry heats and dusty ways of common life, we too must be led aside from the tumult of the world's busy week, and made to drink of the brook by the way. In other words, the roots of our being must be struck deep into the soul of fulfilled relations to God if we are to gather force and freshness for our daily work.[1]

3. *Restoration.*—There are private fields and gardens and vineyards in the shepherd country, and if a sheep stray into them and is caught there, it is forfeited to the owner of the land. So 'He restoreth my soul' means 'the shepherd brings me back, and rescues my life from forbidden and fatal places.'

It is necessay that the shepherd should be so interested in the sheep that when one wanders from the fold, and is in danger of perishing in the wilderness, he should leave all, and go after it, and never rest until he find it. So, says the Psalmist, 'He restoreth my soul.' For even in those who have passed under the rod of the good Shepherd there is a native tendency to backsliding. There is the vexing remnant of an evil heart of unbelief, which by a subtle influence brings about a departure from the living God. It is distressing that such should be the case, but so it is, and here is the remedy provided. He will not cast off the wanderer who has strayed from the fold. He who went after him at the first will go forth upon his devious track again, true to His character as the 'Shepherd and Bishop of souls.' He will make His entreating voice be heard in the silence of the wilderness, where they 'wander in a solitary way.' 'Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings.' And hearing it they are filled with shame and sorrow, yet have heart to say, 'Unto whom shall we go, but unto thee?' 'Turn thou us, and we shall be turned, for thou art the Lord our God.' 'For thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. . . . I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick: . . . I will feed them with judgment.'

¶ When I met Garibaldi in Rome, I was told by one of his friends of a noble deed of his, in search of a lamb that had been lost. As his soldiers were on their march, one of them took away a pet lamb from a house they were passing on their way. The girl whose pet lamb it was, was told that the only hope of recovering it was to go to the General herself, and tell her story to him. She did so. The General in his tent in the evening listened to her tale, and told her to come back to him next day. Generally he was astir at a very early hour, and his servant wondered next morning that he did not hear him moving at the usual time. Going into his tent he found him still asleep; and was amazed to see a lamb at the bottom of his bed, wrapped up in the General's plaid. Garibaldi, after listening to the girl's tale, had gone from tent to tent among his soldiers in search of the pet lamb, inquiring everywhere throughout the camp until he found it. He found it in time to rescue it from death. He gave to it a new life, and to her from whom it had been taken, a new joy.[1]

[1] H. Howard, *The Shepherd Psalm*, 32.

[1] W. H. Gray, *Our Divine Shepherd*, 15.

4. *Guidance.*—'He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake' (AV). In the Revised Version the word 'leadeth' has been changed into 'guideth.' That is the only word in the Psalm that the Revisers have altered, and it is a better translation of the word in the Hebrew. We have the word 'leadeth' in verse 2; but the word in verse 3 is a different word in the original, and this latter word the Revisers have translated 'guideth.' The 'leadeth' in verse 2 refers to the shepherd going before the sheep, down to the burn-side, and the flock following him. But the 'leadeth'—or, rather, 'guideth'—in verse 3 speaks of what happens when the sheep have left the green pastures and are travelling on the weary road, with its heat and dust.

The two usages have very different surroundings. In the first the surroundings are pastoral, a deep restfulness is in the air, and all things are significant of relaxation and repose. 'He leadeth me beside waters of rest.' It is like walking on the banks of a river on some serene Saturday night, when the work of the week is over, and the very beasts of the field seem to have begun their Sabbatic rest. In the second usage the surroundings are altogether changed. Rest becomes action; relaxation becomes strenuousness. We leave the 'waters of rest' for the exposed and storm-swept uplands. We turn to the frowning slopes, with their terrors of wild beasts and tempests. Life becomes militant. 'He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness.' It is like leaving the sweet and fragrant vineyards of the lower Alpine slopes for the bars and craggy heights, and the dubious and treacherous ways of the snow. But the Guide who leads through the vineyard leads also through the snows; and it is the same God who leads by the 'waters of rest' who also leads into exacting and exhausting 'ways of righteousness.' The Lord of the restful valley is also King of the flood and Sovereign of the terrible heights.

The paths are paths of righteousness. They are made and appointed by the holy will of God. There is nothing of caprice about them, and therefore nothing of cruelty. The absolutely righteous God hath said, 'This is the right road for me!' The road has been ordained by righteousness for righteousness. The path has been chosen by the righteous Lord in order that we may become righteous too. Says an old expositor, 'What good is it to have green pastures and black souls, still waters and turbulent spirits?' And so the Lord leads us into these paths of His own choice in order that by the journey we may attain unto a pure and holy life.

Are these paths through the wilderness? Sometimes. But the way through the waste is known to the Leader's eye.

¶ It is marvellous how the expert eye can see the way across the waste. On a very memorable day last year I crossed the moors from Goathland to Pickering, and for an hour or two lost my way. But I caught sight of a leisurely rider directing his horse where there was apparently no path, but moving with quiet and restful progress. He knew every token which suggested the trend of his journey. And so it is with my Lord; He sees the path when I see nothing but waste. My life with God is not an aimless loiter, a fruitless wandering, a tiresome roundabout. My Lord knows the paths, and 'He leadeth me!' And is not that evangel full of inspiration, that when it seems all dry, trackless desert, the eye of our Leader sees the way to the other side? Within these last few days I have been to see a dying woman, dying from cancer, and she quietly turned her head, and said to me, 'He knows what He is doing!' There is everything in that! When we are sure that the Leader has a plan we can be perfectly calm in the fellowship.[1]

5. *Comfort.*—'Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.' The Hebrew verb is a very beautiful one. Its literal meaning is to help another, choked with grief or fear, to breathe freely, and give his heart air.

¶ Ah, madam, you should see the sheep cuddle near the shepherd to understand the word, 'They comfort me.' The shepherd's

[1] J. H. Jowett.

call, 'Ta-a-a-a, Ho-o-o,' and the answering patter of feet as the sheep hurry to him, are fit sounds to be chosen out of the noisy world to show what comfort God gives to souls that heed His voice; and those sounds have been heard in my country this day as they were the day this shepherd psalm was written![1]

6. *Entertainment.*—'Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.' Our table is where the Lord will sit with us; the daily bread is that which the Lord breaks to us. God cares for us in daily life; cares for our bodies; cares for our business. The Lord Jesus Christ in His great Sermon on the Mount sought to deliver us from our natural eagerness about what we shall eat and what we shall drink and what we shall wear—not by making these things insignificant and unimportant. That is what the Church has very often done since; but He made these things so significant and so important that the Heavenly Father cared for them. He sought to cure our care, not by making the body so much less than the soul, and this life so much less than the other that it was beneath a thought. Not at all. But by making the body so wonderful that in itself it is a pledge of clothing; by making this life so sacred that it carries in itself the assurance of the meat. 'Is not the life more than meat and the body than raiment'—this mystery of nerve, and brain, and muscle? Is not this life more than meat—this mystery of life of which none can tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth? He who gives the body, will He not give also what is needful to the body? He who gives the life, will not He give that on which the life depends? Well may we begin here. God cares for our bodies as much as for our souls; cares for us in business as much as in church. Love cannot love in bits and patches; it must love always, everywhere, in everything, or it is no love. Let us forget about *souls*, and think that God loves us as *men and women*, cares for us at the table and sees to the daily bread.[1]

¶ The table spread in the sight of the enemy is a more signal token of care and power than the green pastures are. Life is not only journey and effort, but conflict; and it is possible not only to have seasons of refreshment interspersed in the weary march, but to find a sudden table spread by the same unseen hand which holds back the foes, who look on with grim eyes, powerless to intercept the sustenance or disturb the guests. This is the condition of God's servant—always conflict, but always a spread table. Joy snatched in the face of danger is specially poignant. The flowers that bloom on the brink of a cataract are bright, and their tremulous motion adds a charm. Special experiences of God's sufficiency are wont to come in seasons of special difficulty, as many a true heart knows. It is no scanty meal that waits God's soldier under such circumstances, but a banquet accompanied with signs of festivity, viz., the head anointed with oil and the cup which is 'fulness.' God's supplies are wont to surpass the narrow limits of need and even to transcend capacity, having a something over which as yet we are unable to take in, but which is not disproportioned or wasted, since it widens desire and thereby increases receptivity.[2]

7. *Permanence.*—'Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.' Up to this point there has been no hint of permanence in the Psalm. Everything has been suggestive of movement and change. The whole atmosphere of the poem is that of camp life, with its countless perils, its exigencies of hunger and thirst, and its fragile tents the only shelter from wilderness, heat, and cold. Now, in some of its aspects such a life has many attractions. Its shifting scenes, its free-and-easy customs, its clean and healthy environments, together with the primitive simplicity of its relations, constitute a charm

[1] W. A. Knight, *The Song of our Syrian Guest*, 14.

[1] M. G. Pearse, *In the Banqueting House*, 156.
[2] A. Maclaren, *The Book of Psalms* (*Expositor's Bible*), 230.

to which even city dwellers pay a more or less unconscious tribute every time they picnic or spread their table in the open air. But this is only one side of the picture. It makes all the difference whether such a life is self-chosen as a temporary escape from over-conventionality, or whether it is forced upon us by the necessities of circumstance. It is one thing to be able to choose our own time and place for camping out, and please ourselves as to its duration; it is quite another to be born and bred under nomadic conditions, and to be compelled, gipsy-like, to wander to and fro upon the face of the earth, with no fixed place of abode. It is this perpetually recurring element of change which constitutes the pathos of the pilgrim's lot, and which so frequently appeals to us from prophecy and psalm. The tent-dwellers ever had an instinctive outreaching towards something more substantial and enduring in the way of habitation. They longed for a time when the transient should give place to the abiding. They looked for a city that had foundations, whose Builder and Maker was God. Now, their pilgrim days are a type of our earthly career. For the deeper we look beneath the surface of things, the more we see how fitly does this life of ours correspond to a pilgrimage. In our truest and best moments we realize that this is not our rest. Our instincts reach out for 'a better country, that is, an heavenly.' Our text meets this instinct. 'The house of the Lord' as a symbol of security and permanence is set over against the movable desert-tent.

But we want more than a house. We require a home! And here our text comes to our relief. The word translated 'house' is the Hebrew word for 'home.' The 'house of the Lord' is not a suite of empty rooms. Its festal board is thronged with happy faces of our kindred; its stately halls are vocal with their song. They are absent from the body, but they are 'at home' with the Lord. The perils of the pilgrimage are over, and for ever they are safe. And what is true for them will be true for us in our time.

Shepherd, Guide, Friend.

Ps. xxiii.

Whoever this inspired poet may have been, he was giving a little sketch of his own life, speaking out of a long and deep experience, and narrating how he had thought of God at the different stages of his career. The Psalm is the autobiography of a soul.

Let us examine the Psalm from this biographical point of view. The Psalmist divided his life into three periods; and these three periods may be described as youth, middle age, and old age. In these three periods he thought of God in three different ways. In his youth he thought of God as a shepherd; in middle age he thought of God as a guide; and in old age he thought of God as a friend. The same truth may be put in another way. As the Psalmist gives three pictures of God, so he gives three descriptions of himself. First, he describes himself as a sheep, needing the shepherd's care; secondly, he is a traveller, needing a guide; and thirdly, he is a guest at the Royal table. And the same truth may be put in yet a third way. In addition to describing God and himself under three different images, the Psalmist, to make his picture complete, describes three different scenes. The first scene is the bright green pasture, where the sheep lie down; the second is the dark and dangerous valley; and the third, where the feast is spread, is the Royal palace. For all practical purposes, therefore, this Psalm may be divided into three equal parts. Each part consists of two verses; and the Psalmist tells us how, as the long years passed, he learned to know more and more of the Eternal. In his youth he knew very little of God; in middle age, by hard experience, he learned a great deal more; and in old age, like Moses on the Mount, he saw God face to face. Let us now trace the steps of his upward progress.

1. *Youth, or God as a Shepherd.*—What does the Psalmist mean when he says, 'The Lord is my shepherd'? Let us here beware of a natural misconception. As the shepherd

in Palestine goes before the sheep, we are naturally tempted to suppose that God is here represented as a guide, and this supposition seems supported by the words 'He leadeth me.' But this idea—God as a guide—is not the main idea in the Psalmist's mind. By the term 'Shepherd' he means, not guide, but provider; the sheep are going, not on a long and dangerous journey, but only a very few yards to the nearest pasture-land; and the shepherd provides for their physical needs by taking them where the grass is rich and where the well is deep. There the sheep can satisfy their hunger; there the shepherd, like Rebecca, can draw clear water from the well and place it in the troughs; there, refreshed, restored, and revived, the sheep can now lie down in safety and sleep.

In one sense Shepherd is a beautiful name for God; in another sense it is a very imperfect name. For what reason may we call it a good name? Because it teaches us humility. As the shepherd takes the sheep to the green pastures and the deep wells, so God, in His Holy Word, has provided us with spiritual food; and, as the sheep would die of starvation unless the shepherd saw to their needs, so we should be spiritually dead unless God, in Christ our Lord, had given us the bread of eternal life.

In what sense is Shepherd an imperfect name for God? Because the relation between the sheep and the shepherd is not the ideal relation which God desires to exist between us and Himself. Between the shepherd and the sheep there is no real fellowship. Can the sheep talk to the shepherd? No. Can they understand him fully when he speaks to them? No. Can they share his thoughts, his feelings, his moral ideals, his plans and purposes? No. Can they hate what he hates; love what he loves; value what he values; and admire what he admires? No. Between the shepherd and the sheep there is really very little sympathy. As long as they obtain from him what they want, they care little else about him; to them it is a matter of perfect indifference whether his moral character is good or bad; and that, alas! is how many people still think about God. God sends rain and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness; God keeps us in good health, and shields our homes from danger; and there, with many of us, the matter ends. With this, however, God Himself is not content. God does not desire us to be mere sheep; God, as the prophet Ezekiel said, desires His sheep to be men.

2. *Middle Age, or God as a Guide.*—The scene changes. Instead of the youth, in the shelter of home, we have now the middle-aged man; instead of the field, we have now the darksome valley; and that valley, with its dangers, represents the stern and difficult path of daily duty. Let us note precisely what the Psalmist says. He is not thinking here about his last moments. Instead of translating 'the valley of the shadow of death,' we ought rather to translate 'the valley of intense darkness.' The Psalmist was thinking about the deep gullies in the immediate neighbourhood of Jerusalem; he had often been in those gullies himself when on his way to one of the great festivals; and the idea in his mind is that, just as those gullies were infested by wild beasts and robbers, so in the round of daily duty the God-fearing man has to face a host of dangers, doubts, crises, perplexities and problems. But now notice how he speaks about God. There, in the gloomy valley, God and the Psalmist are together; there they are walking side by side; there they can now converse with each other. In the past God had been merely the Shepherd; now He is the Counsellor and Guide, and walking by the traveller's side, He not only defends him with His club and supports him with His staff, but also gives him wise counsel, points out the right way, and leads him in the paths of righteousness. And that is the very God we Christians need.

3. *Old Age, or God as a Friend.*—Once again the scene changes; and now the Psalmist has a still grander experience. In his youth he had thought of God as a shepherd; in middle age, with its doubts and fears, he had

trusted God as a guide, and now, when his eye was growing dim, and his natural force was abated, he found that God, his glorious King, condescended to be his host and friend. The scene of the story is now the Royal palace. He has left the dark and gloomy valley behind; his toils and dangers are over; he has arrived at the palace gate. The King Himself comes out from the palace to greet him; the King anoints his head with oil, and welcomes him as a friend; the King leads the weary traveller to His banqueting-house; the King hands him the exhilarating cup. There, in the Royal palace, he is safe from his foes; there, where the Royal table is spread, he talks with the King of Glory as a man talketh with his friend; there, at last, he learns the meaning of fellowship with God.[1]

The Shepherd.

Ps. xxiii. 1.—'The Lord is my shepherd.'

To understand the figure it is necessary to picture in our minds the Syrian shepherd as he was known to the writer of this Psalm. The Syrian shepherd was a wanderer. He had no settled abode. His business was to lead his sheep over vast tracts of wilderness territory, ever on the outlook for pasture and water, not always easy to find in a land visited by protracted seasons of drought. The Syrian shepherd was a hero. He carried with him weapons wherewith to defend the sheep when attacked by wolves or robbers, or when in peril of destruction by mountain torrents; and there is on record more than one instance of a Syrian shepherd losing his life in the endeavour to preserve the lives of the sheep committed to his care. The Syrian shepherd, moreover, was a solitary. For him the joys of human companionship were comparatively unknown. His companions generally were the silent stars by night and the speechless sheep by day. The result of all this was the formation of a wonderfully close union between the shepherd and his sheep. Originally far apart, he, a man made in the image of God, and they, irrational beasts that perish, the distance between them became gradually less and less. The shepherd stooped to feel the weakness and dependence of the sheep; he began to know them, giving each a name; he would call them and they would follow him. The sheep, on the other hand, looked up and recognized their shepherd's constant care for them; they realized the protection which his presence and leadership guaranteed, and they hesitated not to obey his voice. How was this remarkable union produced? It was produced by the condescension—the stooping down—of the shepherd and the uprising of the response of unquestioning trust on the part of the sheep. 'Jehovah is my Shepherd.' There is no sweeter chord in all the harmonies of the Hebrew Revelation than this representation of the shepherd-like care of the Almighty God for the people whom He had called into fellowship with Himself. 'He shall feed his flock like a shepherd, he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.'

This figure of the shepherd was often on Christ's lips.

In the East the sheep were the wealth and possession of the shepherd. He lived with them and for them. It was this possession that made the Lord Jesus choose the figure of the shepherd. Again and again He dwells on it. When the scribes and Pharisees came murmuring against Him that He received sinners and ate with them, He turned upon them and asked, 'What man of you, if he have a hundred sheep, and lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, and saith, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep—my sheep which was lost.' The strength of it all lies in that 'my'—my sheep. Protection grows out of possession; the rod first, and then the staff. See how the Saviour, when He speaks of Himself as the Good Shepherd, dwells upon that word 'own' (especially in the Revised Version). 'He that is an hire-

[1] J. A. Hutton, *The Downfall of Satan*, 157ff.

ling, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. . . . I am the Good Shepherd, and know my own, and my own know me.' In the consciousness of His authority, and in all this blessed sense of ownership, He stands and pledges Himself to us: 'I give unto my sheep eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.'

And Christ the Shepherd knows each individual sheep. Horace Bushnell says that Jesus is not the keeper of a hive of bees, knowing well the hive but not knowing any particular bee in it; but He is the keeper of a flock of sheep, knowing not only the flock, but every sheep in it. Mr. Moody used to have a suggestive word, which he was fond of repeating, as to how the shepherd knows the sheep. Someone asked a shepherd that question, and he laughed as he answered, 'I know them all by their defects. You see that sheep has a bit out of its ear, and that sheep walks a little lame, and that sheep has lost a patch of wool: I know them by their defects.' Even after our most rapturous experience is it not true that the Lord will know us by our defects? At best we are a lame lot. But it is good to think that He knows us by our graces too—the graces He Himself has bestowed upon us.

¶ I was in a business meeting a few months ago where in a pause for praise and prayer a man sang with rapture in his face, eyes shut, and the glory shining through. He was quite unconscious of it, but I shall always remember that man in future by the transfiguring light of that moment. I think the Lord knows us too by the graces that He bestows upon us.[1]

Wants.

Ps. xxiii. 1.—'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.'

THERE is probably no utterance of Hebrew piety that would be so generally accepted as the purest expression of the essence of religious sentiment as the Twenty-third Psalm. Its words, which a child can commit to memory, are few and simple, but they cover a depth of meaning which the meditations of philosophers and saints fail to exhaust. This Psalm, which comes down to us from the hills of primitive Judæa, is not only a beautiful and comforting piece of poetry, but has in it a deep heart of eternal truth.

It belongs to what has been described as 'The Bible of the heart,' which is really the heart of the Bible—that part of our sacred literature which appeals most directly and powerfully to what in us is simply human. Old, perhaps, when the Iliad was written, it yet expresses a faith whose value does not alter from age to age. Like all the purest and noblest expressions of the religious sentiment, the truth in it never becomes obsolete, no matter how much opinion may change and theories come and go and the thoughts of men widen with the process of the suns. In our life we have needs which had no place in the life of the ancient Hebrews,—needs which are related to a more fully developed and complex civilization, and to a period of rapid progress in things material, intellectual, and social—but our deepest needs know neither past nor present, and the heart of religion, its heart of sorrow and joy, is the same to-day as yesterday. And it is this fact, and not any mere theory about their inspiration, that has made the sweet singers of Israel the poets of our inner life far more intimately than even Dante or Milton or Browning.

Amid all the distractions of modern business, the din of machinery, the whirl of city-life, this snatch of holy pastoral song comes to us like a breath of morning air from the hill-side, or like a calm, cool hand upon a flushed and fevered brow. And the emblem is dearer still, because it has been confirmed and hallowed by the lips of One greater than the Psalmist. He who put into the Psalmist's heart the thought that the Lord was his Shepherd has since appeared amongst men in human form, and claimed the title for Himself: 'I am the good shepherd; the good shep-

[1] W. Y. Fullerton, *The Practice of Christ's Presence*, 38.

herd giveth his life for the sheep.' Let us, then, think of 'David's Son' who was 'David's Lord,' as we meditate on the old, familiar words of the text; and let us look at the various 'wants' of our human life as they are here briefly and beautifully summed up by the Psalmist.

1. First of all, we want *nourishment*. The shepherd brings the sheep to 'pastures' where they may feed. And does not the Lord our Shepherd also remember our need of nourishment? The body, the mind, the spirit—each, in order to its sustenance, requires its appropriate food; each must be led into its own pastures. And all this nourishment is provided for us by God. The prayer, 'Give us this day our daily bread,' rises ever before His throne; and what is each year's autumn but the answer to that prayer? And it is God who gives us work, and the capability of working, and a blessing on our toil. Nor is food for the body the only or the chief nourishment we want. The faculties of the mind need to be sustained and strengthened. And what abundance of pasturage the Lord has supplied for this! What varied fields of knowledge He has thrown open to us! He has placed us in a world rich with instruction for every seeking intellect. Think, too, of the provision that He has made for our spiritual necessities. The 'eternal life' must also be sustained by its own appropriate nourishment; and into the pasture of prayer and fellowship with Himself the Lord brings all souls who are willing to be brought. The Good Shepherd has even said: 'I am the living bread which came down from heaven . . . the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.' Rather than let His creatures miss the satisfaction of their deepest cravings, the Lord has given Himself to them, that by His own holy love, manifest in a human life and death, He might appease the hunger of their souls.

¶ In one of his addresses to students, in this case a pre-communion address, Professor Henry Drummond said: 'I was talking last Sunday to a man who said that though he could live for Christ at the close of the meetings, or could even for a month or so keep straight, yet after that his new life went down and was lost. Now, this proves two things. It proves the possibility of a man living for Christ and keeping straight under suitable conditions, and it proves also that if a man tries living without the Bread he will flag and die. You can't live on air. You can't live on one another. You can't live on what I say; but you can live on the Bread of Life, which is Jesus Christ.' [1]

2. We want *refreshment*. The shepherd brings his flock to the 'waters.' The sheep must drink as well as feed. And just as pasturage is an emblem of all that nourishes, so water is an emblem of all that refreshes. How exhilarating to the weary and thirsty traveller is a draught of clear, cool water! 'He shall drink of the brook in the way; therefore shall he lift up the head.' And many of these 'brooks in the way' has God given us. He knows that our whole nature needs exhilaration as well as nourishment. There are some men who would have us always feeding in the pastures, and who grudge us the dancing and singing of the rivulet as it sparkles in the sunshine. But the Lord is a wiser Shepherd. He knows that His flock will be all the better for a varied scene; and so He not only takes them to the water to drink, but also 'leads them beside the waters.' And notice, it is 'the still waters.' Not, of course, the stagnant pool, but the quiet streamlet which ripples gently along, murmuring ever in its course a low, sweet melody. The truest joys of our nature are always thus still and quiet, yet gushing and lively. And the difference between the pleasures that God gives and those to which the devil tempts is just this: the former exhilarate, the latter intoxicate.

¶ Petronius dreamed a dream. He was chasing Pleasure. He hunted her up hill and down dale, but could not clutch her skirts. He gave up the chase in despair. And lo, as he abandoned it, he saw One approaching him

[1] *The Life of Henry Drummond*, 493.

with marks of wounds in His hands and in His feet, and with scars as of thorns on His brow, 'My ways are ways of pleasantness,' He said, 'and all My paths are peace!' And he took the Stranger's hand and they walked together. And, as they walked, Pleasure returned and took his other hand, and he found that, by yielding to the persuasions of the Christ, he had obtained the company of Pleasure too. And Petronius awoke, and learned by long and happy experience that the dream that he had dreamed was true.[1]

3. A third want of our nature is *rest*. The shepherd not only brings his flock into the pastures that they may feed; he likewise 'makes them lie down' in some cool, shady spot that they may rest. Rest is a need of human nature. Our bodies cannot be always working or eating; they ask for repose. And so, every night, the Lord 'maketh us to lie down.' What a strange yet blessed boon is this nightly rest! We lie down, worn and weary; we relapse into a condition in which we live on, without knowing that we live; then by-and-by we wake up again, refitted for our labour. Our souls, too, need repose as well as nourishment and exhilaration. There is far too little repose about the life of most of us. We are too much in a hurry. Even in the Christian living of our time there is too much bustle. The Christian Church is doing a great deal of work; but she would work better if she rested more. She is rather 'cumbered with much serving.' There is too much impatience. We are too anxious even about spiritual results. Our endeavours to do good are pitched in the key of the factory rather than of the cornfield; there is too much of the clank of machinery, too little waiting as for a harvest. We do not meditate enough. There is plenty of pasturage: there is too little 'rumination.' But all this is our own fault, not the Shepherd's. Jesus says, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden; and I will give you rest.' He offers us His own 'peace.' He gives us opportunities of calming our souls by quietly looking into the realities of the eternal world. We must indeed shirk no activities to which we are summoned by the call of duty; but let us also remember that there are times when the Lord our Shepherd would have us 'lie down in the green pastures.'

[1] F. W. Boreham, *Wisps of Wildfire*, 87.

¶ Rest is the condition of all true moral and spiritual receptiveness. Half our failure to respond to spiritual realities is due to our fussy obsession in merely external things, our incapacity for rest. The struggle for existence in which we are now engaged roars round us, the smoke of its conflict rises above our heads, and we hear and see nothing beyond it. When we turn to amusement it is too often only to imprison ourselves further in the lower elements of life. We fight or we dance, but we are never quiet. In our struggle to possess things we never possess ourselves. In our search for pleasure we lose our manhood. We are strangers equally to the moral purpose of the world and our own spiritual conditions. Knowledge is not given except to men who will draw aside to learn it. Only in quietness, which is the condition of spiritual receptivity, do men learn the true secret of life.

Great souls have always found their inspiration in quietness. Religion has been cradled in solitude. Its leaders in all ages have known the worth of rest. They have sought it far from the crowded city and the noise of the market-place. The Founder of Christianity confessed its necessity for Himself and for that communion with the Divine Father which was the very breath of His life. He sought it in mountain heights, in the quiet hours of the night, or in the house of God. He taught His disciples its infinite worth, and that they learned their lesson is proved by the history of Christianity. In quietness the revelation came to them, and in the light it gave they returned to their fellow-men with a message from God.[1]

4. A fourth want of our nature is *guidance*. It was the custom of the Eastern shepherd

[1] *Life's True Values*, Selected Essays from *The Times*, 113.

not to drive his sheep before him, but to walk in front of them. To quote the words of Jesus: 'He calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him; for they know his voice.' It is the same custom that is referred to in our Psalm—'He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness.' We all need guidance. 'It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.' Often we are perplexed as to what is our right path; and even when we have found it there are so many by-paths on either side that we are constantly liable to go astray. But the Lord does not leave us to ourselves. He is continually directing our course for us. By His word He directs us, giving it as a 'light to our feet and a lamp to our path,' and seeking to keep us in the way of duty by its precepts, exhortations, and encouragements. He directs us also by His providence, sometimes hedging in our course by stern yet merciful barriers of circumstance—preventing us from taking the way of our own foolish inclination, bringing us into experiences which we would never of ourselves have chosen, and thus leading us 'by a way which we knew not.' Yea, the Good Shepherd has Himself 'gone before His sheep,' that His sheep may 'follow Him.'

Through good report and evil, Lord,
Still guided by Thy faithful word,
Our staff, our buckler, and our sword,
We follow Thee.

In silence of the lonely night,
In the full glow of day's clear light,
Through life's strange windings, dark or bright,
We follow Thee.

Strengthened by Thee, we forward go,
'Mid smile or scoff of friend or foe;
Through pain or ease, through joy or woe,
We follow Thee.

Great Master, point Thou out the way,
Nor suffer Thou our steps to stray;
Then in the path that leads to day,
We follow Thee.

Thou hast passed on before our face,
Thy footsteps on the way we trace;
Oh keep us, aid us by Thy grace:
We follow Thee.[1]

5. Another want of our nature is *restoration.* The sheep sometimes needs to be 'restored.' And this in two ways. Sometimes it grows languid or sick, and the shepherd has to restore it to strength. Sometimes, again, it wanders astray and the shepherd has to go in search of it that he may restore it to the fold. Even so the Lord our Shepherd 'restoreth our souls.' For though we cannot of ourselves walk in the paths of righteousness,' we may ourselves wander from these paths, and choose a way of our own, and refuse to be led by the Lord. This, indeed, is what we actually do every time we commit sin. We choose the path of our own self-will, instead of trusting in the love of God and following His guidance. Even when we do not positively sin, how often do we grow weak and languid, and feel as if we cannot follow the Shepherd any further. The road is hard and stony, and we have become footsore. Duty is difficult, and we are almost ready to give up the effort. Then comes the Shepherd in His mercy, and invigorates our fainting souls. Thus also He 'restoreth our souls' when we are weak and weary.

¶ I am in no doubt whatever of the loving intention of the Father to me, His very frail and wilful child. Sin and doubt and fear very often overcome me, and I know how little reason I give to others to be recognized as a Christian; but I do recognize Christ as my Lord and Master, and would keep His will, if I could; and though I go astray like a sheep that is lost, I do indeed know that my Shepherd follows me and seeks me; I discern Him moving towards the dawn; His hand guides me, puts aside the thorny branches through which I could not press, leads me beside the waters of comfort. I can dare to be joyful beneath His eye. I do not know what the end will be, or what eager energy of life lies

[1] Horatius Bonar.

beyond the dark river; but I am redeemed and fed, and shall some day be satisfied![1]

6. One other want of our nature is the comfort of *protection*. The sheep are not always led by pleasant paths along sunny hill-slopes. Sometimes the road lies through a rocky gorge in some dark valley where the shadows are almost as gloomy as night. But the shepherd is there, emboldening his troubled flock to advance through the shadows; and the sight of his protecting 'rod and staff' is like a 'light in the darkness.' Even so, though the Lord is leading us, He does not always guide us into such paths as we would choose. Sometimes we are looking forward to pleasant hill-slopes which we see before us in the distance, when, all of a sudden, the shepherd turns aside by some unexpected path, and we perceive that our course lies for a time through the 'Valley of the Shadow.' Now it is the shadow of disease or pain, instead of the bright sunshine of health; and again it is the shadow caused by the loss of property or the alienation of friends. But if we believe that the Lord our Shepherd is with us, if by faith we see His rod and staff, then we have the comfort of protection; we 'fear no evil'; we believe that 'all things are working together for our good.'

Thou knowest all the past: how long and blindly
On the dark mountains the lost wanderer strayed;
How the good Shepherd followed, and how kindly
He bore it home, upon His shoulders laid,
And healed the bleeding wounds, and soothed the pain,
And brought back life, and hope, and strength again.

Thou knowest all the present: each temptation,
Each toilsome duty, each foreboding fear;
All to each one assigned of tribulation,
Or to belovèd ones than self more dear;
All pensive memories, as we journey on,
Longings for vanished smiles and voices gone.

Thou knowest all the future: gleams of gladness
By stormy clouds too quickly overcast;
Hours of sweet fellowship, and parting sadness,
And the dark river to be crossed at last.
O what could hope and confidence afford
To tread that path but this—Thou knowest, Lord?[1]

[1] A. C. Benson, *Thy Rod and Thy Staff*, 95.

Leading.

Ps. xxiii. 2.—'He leadeth me.'

The need of guidance is a real and fundamental human need. Life is so strangely perplexing, appearances are so misleading, errors and mistakes are so easy and their consequences so serious, that we are not surprised that the need of guidance finds such abounding expression in the religious literature of the world. Most of us have lived long enough to have learned by experience to be doubtful of human wisdom, especially of our own wisdom, in the conduct of life and its affairs. How much of the pain and misery we have known has proceeded from following a way which we were persuaded at the time was a right one, but which we now see had self-will, some whim or caprice, some vanity or pride, or some other meanness as its motive. We thought it to be right, yet it brought us no blessing. It exposed us to inward loss and suffering at every turn. Slowly the thought forced itself upon us that the faith was a wrong one, and that we must seek a more excellent way.

There is a passage in one of Sir Arthur Helps' essays, too long to quote, which places before us an aspect of human life which could hardly have occurred to a man who had been uniformly successful in guiding his life or who had not very carefully and sympathetically watched the errors and mistakes of others. It

[1] Jane L. Borthwick.

begins with this sentence: 'Frequently it seems as if the faculties of man were not quite adequate to his situation here. Were success in life the main object it would certainly appear as if a little more faculty were sadly needed.' In hours of critical trial we feel the need of wisdom higher and better than any which we can find in ourselves or our fellows. It often seems at such times that our faculties were in truth not quite adequate as yet to our situation. The inadequacy and limitation, it is true, may be largely due to the lack of discipline and to an imperfect, unsymmetrical development, but the imperfection is still a fact, and no more rectitude of intention will secure us against making errors and mistakes. Call it by whatever name we like, we are bound to recognize opposing forces in human nature. There is the flesh lusting against the spirit and the spirit striving to subdue and make holy the flesh. There is the ill balance of a mind which is even richly endowed; there is the over-development not only of a particular faculty, but of a particular excellence; there is the want of moral proportion, the offending or falling short in one point which mars the whole. Our very power to see the many sides or aspects of actions and affairs may make us uncertain and hesitating in critical moments, as it did Hamlet. It is well enough to talk of the distinctions between right and wrong, but they are often so modified and blended by sidelights, they so shade off into each other, that it is difficult for all but the most honest and clear-seeing souls to disentangle them.[1]

Is it not a comfort to know that there is an infallible Guide whom we can always trust—One who understands our weaknesses and suits His leading to our needs. For the methods of Divine guidance are many. The Great Leader is like a wise human leader, He adapts His ministries to the nature of the child and the character of the immediate need.

1. He leads *by laying a strong hand on us.* 'And the Lord spake thus to me with a strong hand,' says the prophet Isaiah. Let us apprehend the figure. The counsel of the Lord came to Isaiah like a strong hand, as something he could not escape. The intuition laid hold upon him like an arrest. What was the nature of the counsel? He was called upon by the Lord to separate himself from his nation by a solemn act of detachment. He was commanded to confront his people, to oppose them, to leave the majority and stand alone. He was bidden to prophecy the unpleasant and even to predict defeat. The young prophet shrank from the task; but the word of the Lord came to him 'with a strong hand.' The imperative gave him no freedom; heaven laid hold on him with holy violence; the invisible gripped his conscience as a man's arm might be gripped, until it ached in the grasp.

Now this is one method of leading—a grip like that of a powerful constable. This was the kind of leading that came to Saul as he journeyed to Damascus. It was the kind of violent arrest that laid hold of John Bunyan as he played on Elstow Green. Sometimes the violent leading takes the shape of a startling ministry of disappointment or affliction. Sometimes the Lord lays hold of us with the cold, stony grip of fear, and we are moved in the way of life by the terror of impending calamity. But the ministry is governed by infinite mercy and love. 'By terrible things in righteousness dost thou answer us, O God of our salvation.'

2. Sometimes He leads us *with His eye.* 'I will guide thee with mine eye' (Ps. xxxii. 8). We pass from the grip of the hand to the glance of an eye, from a grip as severe as a vice to a touch as gentle as light. We pass from a nipping frost to a soft and cheering sunbeam. How delicate is the guidance of a look! What tender intercourse can pass through the eyes! There is a whole language in their silent communion. But let it be marked that this eye-guidance implies very intimate fellowship. Eye-speech is the speech of lovers. We may be guided by a 'strong hand' even when we are heedless of God; we can be guided by His eye only when we are

[1] J. Hunter, *Faith in Stormy Days*, 57.

gazing on God. There are some communions for which ordinary language is altogether insufficient. Who can explain the message that passes between souls in love with one another; and who can describe the gentle communion of souls in love with God?

Blind souls, who say that Love is blind;
He only sees aright;
His only are the eyes that find
The spirit's central light.

He lifts—while others grope and pry—
His gaze serene and far;
And they but see a waste of sky
Where Love can see the Star.

3. Sometimes God leads us *by hindering us.* Here is an example from the experience of the Apostle Paul: 'After they were come to Mysia they essayed to go into Bithynia, but the spirit suffered them not' (Acts xvi. 7). This was leading by impediment. It was guidance by prohibition. It was the ministry of the closed door. There came to the Apostle what the Friends would describe as a 'stop in the mind.' His thought was resisted and had no liberty. He felt that his purpose was secretly opposed by an invincible barrier. In certain directions he had no sense of spiritual freedom, and therefore he regarded that way as blocked. 'The angel of the Lord stood in the way for an adversary.' God sometimes leads us by negations. The closed door is the indication of His will. We essay to go, but the Spirit suffers us not.

¶ On a morning of June 1903 she left Akpap for Itu, tramping the forest path to Ikunetu in order to pick up the Government launch on its weekly journey to the garrisons upriver. . . . On arriving at Ikunetu she went into the teacher's house to rest, charging the boys to call her as soon as they sighted the launch. They did not notice it until it was too late for her to signal, and it passed onwards and out of sight. But she was not put out; her faith was always strong in the guiding hand of God; and she turned and tramped back the same long road. When she reached the Mission House, tired and weary, she assured Miss Wright that all was well—God had not meant her to travel that day, and she must have been kept back for some purpose.

Next week she set out again, and when she joined the launch at Ikunetu, Colonel Montanaro, the Commander of the Forces, was on board on his way up to Arochuku. In the course of their conversation he gave her a pressing invitation to go there, and to accept his escort. She was almost startled by what seemed so direct a leading. But she was not prepared for a longer journey; she had no change of clothing or supply of food. She thought and prayed over the matter all the way. 'Here is the challenge to enter that region of unbroken gloom and despair,' she mused. 'If it is not entered now, the Roman Catholics will come in, and the key position to the whole territory will be taken out of our hands, and only the coast tribes be left to the Mission. If I go now we shall be the first in the field, and it will not be discourteous to the Roman Catholics—as it would be if we came in afterwards.' Before the end of the journey she consented to go.

When she arrived at Arochuku she found herself in the old slave centre of the Aros, a densely populated district, some 30,000 people living within a radius of a few square miles. It was a strange experience to walk over these roads that had been trodden for centuries by countless feet on their way to the pens of the coast and the horrors of the 'middle passage,' and latterly to the Efik slave-market, and to gaze on the spot where the secret iniquities of the Long Juju had taken place; stranger still to receive a welcome from the men who had been responsible for these evils. The chiefs and traders, many of whom she knew, were delighted with her courage and touched by her self-sacrifice, and promised to do all they could to assist her work. Making arrangements to come up later and start a school, she left, profoundly thankful for the privilege she had been granted.[1]

[1] W. P. Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 198.

Green Pastures.

Ps. xxiii. 2.—'He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.'

In the religious literature of the world there is perhaps no poem we could less afford to lose than the Twenty-third Psalm. If it were expunged from human life a gap would be left that no product of modern inspiration could fill. For it does not come to us alone, this brief psalm of thanksgiving and hope. It is not merely a few dozen words written by an unknown poet in an unknown past. Whether David or someone else wrote these words, they soon passed into the life and literature of the world.

Translated into all tongues and known in every part of the world, this pure expression of religious trust and hope, which blossomed as naturally out of the heart of a devout Hebrew shepherd as lilies bloomed from the sod of the valleys under his feet, has held and carried the fragrance of its spirit into innumerable hearts and homes. Indeed, with the exception of that prayer, where is there another form of words so expressive of the yearning trust and hope of the soul, or so widely applicable to its deep needs? Wide as is the span of years which separates us from this Hebrew singer's time, yet his simple words point us to things that our souls need to know in order to keep their sanity and sweetness, and never more than in these difficult and troubled days.

Take the beautiful words of our text. Are they true only of the Syrian shepherd and his sheep? No, they are true of all places and all times. Where, then, shall we look for the green pastures and the quiet waters? We must look for them in the soul, where, indeed, all the sweetest country is to be found, and where the poorest can possess estates full of pleasant sights and sounds, even when the outer life is cross and changeful as an angry sea. We may remember how Wordsworth, walking by an English lake, saw a 'jocund company' of daffodils 'fluttering and dancing in the breeze'; and how in the fields of the poet's soul they still continued to laugh and dance even when the lake district was swept by wintry storms. He carried the daffodils in his soul.

Men are very weary at heart to-day. Their homes are full of suffering and sorrow. The newspapers tells us so much about physical pain and mental anguish, about the prevalence and intensity of human hatred, about outrage, and cruelty, and deeds of violence. All this gets on our nerves, strained nerves mean bad moods, and bad moods mean sick souls. Dr. Hugh Macmillan has written about a workman whom he saw in the city of Damascus making a necklace out of amber beads. He worked at each separate bead only a moment or two, then, laying one aside, he took up another. He did so because the amber beads became so charged with electricity by the friction of working them that they would fly into pieces unless allowed to rest. The circumstances of life are such to-day that our souls are likely to fly to pieces unless we find rest. We have need to practise what Wordsworth spoke of as 'wise passiveness.'

There are three governing conditions of 'wise passiveness.' They are:

(1) *Faithfulness.*—If a man is in the habit of scamping, even God cannot make him lie down. The first condition of lying down and resting is to be in earnest about our task, eager at it, and absorbed in it.

(2) *Trustfulness.*—Having done our best to act wisely and well, then, even if we have made mistakes, just let us trust God to put them right and lie still.

¶ There is a story told about Mohammed which sums up these conditions. One evening when his army was halting for the night and camping, he heard one of his Arabs say, 'I will loose my camel and leave it to God.' 'Friend,' said Mohammed, 'tie up thy camel and leave it to God.'[1]

(3) *Prayer.*—The way of meditation and prayer is of all ways the best way to the green pastures and the quiet waters of God. 'Enter into the inner chamber,' said Jesus, 'and shut the door, and thy Father who seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.'[1]

[1] R. J. Wardell.

¶ Some years ago a great specialist in mental diseases told the British Medical Association that he knew of no antidote so effective against the causes of mental aberration as the calming and steadying influence of the habit of religious meditation and prayer. It is the sense of God and the unseen and eternal things that saves our sanity. We must therefore make room in our days, however crowded and busy, to practise the Presence of God and to nourish and deepen the sense of the Divine realities of life. We rest ourselves best by retiring within ourselves. Of this Marcus Aurelius says: 'Men seek retreats from themselves; houses in the country, seashore and mountain. But it is in thy power whenever thou shalt choose to retire into thyself. For nowhere either with more quiet or more freedom from trouble does a man retire than into his own soul—particularly when he has within such thoughts that by looking into them he is immediately in perfect tranquillity.' Let us cease rushing after loud and distracting things. Let us cease to demand that the influence that sways us shall be noisy and exciting. The best influences of our lives are the quiet influences.[1]

An hour with Thee! when earliest day
Dapples with gold the eastern gray,
Oh, what can frame my mind to bear
The toil and turmoil, cark and care,
New griefs, which coming hours unfold,
And sad remembrance of the old?
One hour with Thee!

An hour with Thee! when burning June
Waves his red flag at pitch of noon;
What shall repay the faithful swain
His labour on the sultry plain;
And more than care or sheltering bough
Cool feverish blood, and throbbing brow?
One hour with Thee!

One hour with Thee! when sun is set,
Oh, what can teach me to forget
The thankless labours of the day,
The hopes, the wishes flung away;
The increasing wants and lessening gains,
The master's pride who scorns my pains?
One hour with Thee![1]

[1] J. Hunter.

The Waters of Rest.

Ps. xxiii. 2.—'He leadeth me beside the still waters.'

The translators of the English Bible by their rendering of a single word have given us an English scene where they should have given us a Palestinian one. They have not been true to the time and country in which the Psalm was written, and so have not been true to life. What is the picture we have in the English translation, 'He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters'? Is it not that of a beautiful English meadow by the side of a calm lake or quiet deep-flowing stream, an ideal picture of abundance and ease? But such a scene could hardly be found in all Palestine. There, with the exception of the large lakes of Tiberias and the Dead Sea, the latter bitter as brine, and both shadeless under a burning sun, the 'still waters' are the stagnant waters. They are either the marshes of the Huleh or the dirty village pools, the common resort of the town for drinking or washing for cattle and men, more suggestive of buffalo wallows than of English lakes and meadows. If, then, we accept the English translation, 'still waters' we have a picture that, from the oriental standpoint, is either idealistic but untrue to Nature, or realistic at the expense of beauty. But if, keeping closer to the Hebrew original, we read instead of 'still waters' the words 'the waters of rest,' or, more literally, 'of resting places,' which is the form also in the Arabic translation, we shall have a picture at once realistic and not less beautiful, and at the same time more true as a type of spiritual experience. 'He leadeth me beside the waters of rest.' The reference here is to the waters of the noon-tide rest, some sparkling spring or babbling brook, coursing down

[1] Sir Walter Scott.

the valley between its grassy banks and under the shade of its own tangled growth of bushes and trees, where the sheep that have been feeding all the morning on the scanty herbage of the hills above, under a blazing sun, are gathered in by the shepherds at this hottest time of the day to enjoy a cool and refreshing hour.

¶ 'The waters of rest'—the words recall the scene we once witnessed at the 'Ain Mousa,' or Spring of Moses, in the Wady Mousa in Moab near the foot of Mt. Nebo. We had spent the morning in a ride from Medeba to view the Promised Land as Moses viewed it, and at noon descended to 'Ain Mousa' for an hour's rest before returning to Medeba. 'Ain Mousa' is a copious spring of clear, cold water gushing from the side of a great rock, its banks lined with mosses and cresses, and shaded with oleander and fig. We had not been here long when a dozen flocks of sheep and goats were seen in different directions making their way down the steep sides of the valley to the spring. The sun had served as their clock to tell them the proper time, and here for an hour they drank the cool water or lay in the shade of the bushes or nibbled the tender grass and twigs. This was the restoration of soul of which the psalm speaks. What it was to them we knew, not only from their actions, but from our own feelings, for we too had been climbing for hours on the hills above, and were now bathing, drinking the cool water, lunching and resting; in a word, restoring our souls beside the 'waters of rest.' [1]

1. But how does this representation agree with actual experience? Is it really the case, as matter of fact, that the Lord's flock lie down in green pastures, beside the still waters? Do they really enjoy the plenty and peace, the satisfaction and rest, which are here described? For example, there is the great, outstanding fact of persecution. Have they not been oppressed, scattered, driven into the wilderness, hunted unto the death? Have they not been subjected to 'fiery trials'? Have not the ashes of many of them been cast to the winds of heaven? Have they not 'wandered in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth,' and been 'destitute, afflicted, tormented'?

Even so, and yet the experience of this verse has been very largely realized even then. In the very fierceness of persecution—as many a simple story, traced in blood, records—their souls have known His marvellous loving-kindness. They have escaped in spirit from the midst of deadly enemies, compassing them about, into the presence of their God. They have drawn down the curtains of the eyelids and found themselves in the very pavilion and secret place of the Most High, along with the 'Father of Mercies.' They have received supplies of grace that made them strong and glad, and have been inspired with a peace that passeth all understanding, yea, even their own understanding. They have felt the grievousness of hatred and the sword, and yet have exulted to sing, 'The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want; he maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters.'

¶ So Samuel Rutherford found when he wrote from his prison, or, as he called it, 'Christ's Palace' in Aberdeen: 'The Lord hath brought me safe to this strange town. Blessed be His holy name, I find His cross easy and light, and I hope that He will be with His poor sold Joseph, who is separated from his brethren. His comforts have abounded towards me, as if Christ thought shame (if I may speak so) to be in the common of such a poor man as I am, and would not have me lose anything in His errands. My enemies have, beside their intention, made me more blessed, and have put me in a sweeter possession of Christ than ever I had before.' [1]

2. In this age the disturbing element is not persecutions but doubt. No one can look into society and converse with men, or scan the literature of the day, without perceiving the

[1] A. Walker, in *The Biblical World*, xvii. 431.

[1] *Letters of Samuel Rutherford*, ii. 187.

wide-spread existence of scepticism. And the sceptic of this age is found not among the evil livers, but among the thinkers. He is not rude and coarse, but subtle, and polished, and accomplished. Instead, then, of pleasant pasture-lands, and refreshing streams, and a flock peacefully reposing under the Divine Shepherd's care, have we not rather the spectacle of a country the remotest corners of which are filled with rumour, and apprehension, and alarm? Are not the very citadels of revelation assailed? Is the experience of this verse possible in such circumstances? The common people, and the children especially—what is left to them? Instead of peacefully following a shepherd and resting under his care, must we not rather arm ourselves to repel the invader? Must we not answer and silence the gainsayer by irresistible argument? No: we need not. All that is required is a true and fearless surrender of ourselves to Divine teaching. That, and not ability to cope with the doubter or the denier in the strife of argument, is the grand thing required in the present day.

And wherever there is this true and fearless surrender to the teaching of the living God, the experience of this verse is realized to the full extent. They who thus surrender themselves are Divinely led into the green pastures; they drink of the waters of refreshment and are satisfied. The wants of their spiritual nature are fully met; and they move at large in the fields of truth, untroubled by doubt. It is the strange, glorious privilege of trust in God.

The whole secret is in the heart saying 'Jehovah is my Shepherd,' and fearlessly surrendering itself to Him. The surrender, indeed, implies earnest thought, meditation, study, prayer, stooping of intellect, sacrifice of ease, preparedness to obey, according to that deep saying of Jesus, 'If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine': for God is not so a Giver that we are not to be seekers and workers.

¶ Dr. Horton writes of Mrs. Oakes, whose friendship meant so much to him for years: Oxford fascinated her; all the problems I was facing she faced too. As doubt assailed she seemed miraculously forearmed with weapons and arguments to face it for me. Never shall I forget one of the early vacations, when I had been sorely shaken by the weight and variety of the assaults on the faith. I was telling her all the difficulties, and she quoted a verse which up to that time I had never noticed: 'If any man wills to do God's will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.' She had an extraordinary vigour and precision of language; she was logical without studying logic; and she spoke out of the experience she had gained in her own inward wrestles for faith. Those words sank into my heart, and became like a chain-armour fitting closely to the body. I got the conviction, which has deepened ever since, that Christ's doctrine is not established by external arguments, nor by an authority which guarantees Him to us. I had not thought it out then, but the principle was discovered which leads to the conclusion that Christ's doctrine is not proved by an infallible Bible or an infallible Church. But when a man wills with all his might to do God's will, he finds that the doctrine of Christ is of God. She taught me that principle, not on that first visit to Oxford; but the few days with her gave me heart to face what was before me.[1]

It is very beautiful to think that this Psalm is not a prayer. The Psalmist is too sure of God to pray for these things. He speaks of things whereof he knows, he tells of things that he has seen. He has himself lain down by the green grass, and quieted his heart by the waters of rest, and he knew that it was his Shepherd-God who had brought him there. He had walked through dark valleys with a fearless heart, because he knew that the Shepherd was strong and could beat off any foe that might come upon him in the dark. So he does not pray: 'O Lord, be Thou my Shepherd, and let me never want: by the green pastures do Thou lead me, and guide me to the waters of rest, and bring my soul back and cause me to walk in paths that are straight

[1] R. F. Horton, *Autobiography*, 33.

for Thy name's sake. Yea, when I walk through the valley of the deep shadow, may I fear no evil: be Thou Thyself with me, and may Thy rod and Thy staff be my comfort. Do Thou spread a table before me in the presence of my foes, and may my cup run over. And let Thy pity and Thy love follow hard after me all the days of my life, and may I dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.' That would be a beautiful prayer; but the Psalmist does not thus pray. For he knows that Jehovah is all this to him, and more: and he sings over the sweet song to his own heart, for he is very sure of his Shepherd-God.

There is something wonderfully touching in this simple and quiet faith in God as our Shepherd. To win it seems almost the most beautiful thing possible to man—the greatest, as it is the rarest, victory of life. This certitude of soul is the most precious spiritual possession we can desire and seek after, and it is to be attained step by step as experience grows deeper and larger. With patient godly living, with obedience to our highest impulses, and with an open mind to receive the impressions which life as a whole makes upon us, this faith will inevitably grow in the heart, to conquer at last all fears and doubts.

Because He leads
I shall not lack,
From dewy meads
He turns not back.
By waters still
He bids me go,
Where daffodil
And primrose grow.
Oft tho' I stray,
'Tis not to loss,
By every way
He sets a Cross.
And tho' I tread
The valley drear,
Where life lies dead,
I shall not fear.
Because He died,
I need not die.
Love hath defied
Mine enemy.
He holds a cup
Of Life divine,
And bids me sup
His Blood for wine;
Its overflow
Doth sin atone,
Till I shall know
As I am known,
And find in Peace
Upon His breast,
Where sorrows cease,
Eternal Rest.[1]

Restoration.

Ps. xxiii. 3.—'He restoreth my soul.'

The Twenty-third Psalm is not in any special or peculiar sense a sick-bed psalm, but rather a Psalm of the country and of the open-air—cool with the silver shock of running brooks, and fresh and invigorating with the breath of wide plains and far-stretching hills. It speaks to us as to men and women who have not yet forgotten the ancestral life of the fields. Even though we ourselves be city-bred it touches some remote centre of our being, some dim memory as of a pre-existent day when these things were personal experiences to us also. It revives long-buried desires after a more natural mode of living. Those of us who are pent up in streets, choked by the dust and deafened by the din of the town, long to burst the fetters of routine and escape into the country. There we can breathe, and recover the lost elasticity of limb and soul. There in primeval contact with the earth we may regain not only strength of body but youth and buoyancy of soul. Merely to submit ourselves to the healing restorative influences of sun and wind and rain is to put forth new buds of hope and effort, and experience a fresh blossoming of all our lost ideals. The hard crust of habit breaks through the softening spell, and the essential man in us finds leisure and opportunity to live. There are changes in our inner life which we cannot by any exercise of will work for ourselves, but which may be

[1] G. A. Studdert-Kennedy, *Songs of Faith and Doubt*, 45.

wrought upon us if we watch and wait in a 'wise passiveness.' There is a philosophy of lying fallow and permitting Nature to freshen us with her own fertility.

Think you 'mid all this mighty sum
Of things for ever speaking
That nothing of itself will come
But we must still be seeking.

There is a religion of submission and trust —of allowing ourselves to lie down in green pastures, of permitting ourselves to be led by still waters that God may restore our souls.

¶ I wonder if some such experience as this has ever chanced to you? After a night of rain you wake to the blue brightness of a perfect day, and in exhilaration of spirit you enter eagerly on a country walk. You seek the woods and find the ground still wet, save in patches where the hot sun, penetrating through a break in the trees, has thirstily drunk up the rain. In shadowy spots the grass is sparkling with a thousand crystals, and earth seems at the moment like a beautiful human face smiling through tears. The sadness of mortal things lingers upon it, but the sweet day is softly soothing it all away. On such a morning you have, perhaps, seated yourself under the spreading branches of a tree and found yourself curiously listening to all the mysterious wood noises. Presently there is a strange rustle as of some wild creature in the undergrowth, but you watch in vain. Again you hear it; and now see that it comes from a movement in leaves above your head. You think it is a bird or squirrel, and you watch for it, but again you see nothing. At last you observe that it is only the leaves and twigs disentangling themselves in the heat of the day and springing back to their natural freedom after being beaten and pressed together by the night's downpour. The sun has warmed and dried their sodden mass, and they suddenly regain their liberty and dance once more in the light. It was all so invisibly done by the unsuspected restorative power of sun and air. Ah! but more noiselessly and invisibly does God by unsuspected influences heal the bruises of our hearts. He moves through our being more quietly than the undulating air through the leaves; more graciously than the light of the sun. He restoreth our soul. In lonely moments, and merely by our waiting, small bonds that bound us to the cares of our calling, or to the things of sense, snap asunder one by one, and life swings free into the liberty and joy of the love of God.[1]

1. The first step toward the restoration of the soul is to lead us beside the still waters—in the margin, the 'waters of rest.' Those waters of rest may flow for us in a desert place where no stream is, or through the crowded city where yet a place of privacy and a time to think may be found. The essential thing is that there should be a withdrawal, whether compulsory or voluntary, from the rush of life, from its multifarious engagements, rivalries, combats, strivings, defeats, triumphs, from all the fever of living, and that the soul should be at home with itself, free to roam, to wander through space, to muse, to dream, as irresponsible as the viewless wind, not consciously seeking anything, not even God, but ready to be seized and held by the ever-brooding Spirit of the Most High, of whom we rapturously sing, 'He leadeth me beside the waters of rest; He restoreth my soul!' It is of the goodness of God that, like the prophet Ezekiel, we are permitted sometimes to hear His word: 'Arise! Leave the busy city; seek the silent introspective plain, and I will talk with thee there.'

¶ Christians have often been reproached for other-worldliness; but that reproach hardly applies to the modern Church. Do we know anyone who is overmuch preoccupied with dreams of heaven? Richard Baxter tells us that in winter afternoons, when it began to be too dark to go on with his reading and writing and before the candles were brought in, he used to sit quietly in the twilight meditating on the Saints' Everlasting Rest. Few of us find leisure for such meditations now.

[1] J. M. Lloyd-Thomas.

We strive for an earthly paradise so eagerly that our prospect is narrowed by its horizon, and we lose sight of the paradise of God. We grow so intent on improving this world that we have little thought to spare for a better country, that is, a heavenly. And so we go bankrupt of the powers of the world to come. Our religion lacks one great spring of buoyancy and courage and hope. We do not exult in expectation of that perfect life with God—the life which is life indeed—which is waiting for us, moving to meet us, perchance even now knocking at the door.[1]

2. The restoration is completed when we return and place ourselves within the conditions which in other days have favoured the communion of man with God. We shall turn to the associations of prayer and praise and godly fellowship. Soon our hearts will cry, 'I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord.' We shall hasten once more to the ministry of God's Word, and join our feeble prayers with those of the men and women who love Him.

We shall draw near to men of the Spirit, men of enthusiasm and moral fervour, who keep the sacred fire burning in their God-filled souls. We shall find those from whom storm and stress and the discords of life have alienated us, leaving our gift before the altar while we reach out the hand of reconciliation to a brother offended. We shall open once more an old, old Book, and read there the old, old story of Christ's cross and passion, of the seeking, saving love of God incarnate in Jesus Christ His Son. We shall cry aloud to this Jesus of Nazareth who passes by, 'Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us'; and we shall hear His word louder than all gusts of passion, louder than all voices of the street, 'If ye have seen me, ye have seen the Father.'

And so the shadows fall apart,
And so the West winds play,
And all the windows of my heart
I open to the day.

[1] T. H. Darlow, *At Home in the Bible*, 310.

The Right Paths.

Ps. xxiii. 3.—'He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.'

'Into the right paths' is Ibn Ezra's translation. The idea is that there are perilous places for the sheep on all sides, and they never seem to learn to avoid them. And in the shepherd country there are other places which, though not perilous, are forbidden, being private property; and if the sheep stray into these they are liable to become forfeited to the owner of the land. The shepherd must ever be on his guard to prevent his flock from venturing into these fatal and forbidden places. And when they have strayed thither, he will hasten to recall their wandering steps. It is not always easy, even for the shepherd, to discover these 'right paths.' But if he is proud of his good reputation as a skilful leader of flocks he may be trusted not to make many mistakes. The translation to which most of us are accustomed: 'He restoreth my soul (the Hebrew really signifies 'life,' 'self'), he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake,' gives a spiritual meaning to the third verse which is not its primary sense. Yet the literal meaning and the spiritual meaning are so closely intertwined that it is not easy to separate them. The one blends with the other. Having applied his figures of speech to God's care of our physical life, the Psalmist may also have had in view the higher thought that the life of the soul is beset with perils and temptations from which it is deflected only by the Divine guidance. And God acts thus 'for his name's sake'—not for our deserving, but because His mercy is infinite, and He is full of pity and compassion, even for those who stray from the paths of rectitude.

¶ The 'paths of righteousness' are the paths of duty. When these sheep and goats had had their hour of rest and refreshment, it was a remarkable sight to see their preparations for returning to the hills. Apparently without signal from the shepherds, the patriarch of each flock took his stand at some distance

from the brook facing up the hillside in the direction from which he had come. One by one the rest fell in leisurely behind him, till each flock stood ready in single file or column of twos, according as they had been trained, the sheep by themselves, and the goats by themselves, or, as we noticed in one flock, in columns of twos made up of sheep and goats, with the sheep in the left hand file and the goats on the right. And then, when the shepherds had stirred up the few laggards that were still indulging themselves, forgetful of duty, in the shade of the bushes, the columns moved slowly off up the hillsides without breaking their files till they reached the plateau above. We could hardly be persuaded that it was not a sense of duty that the shepherds had imparted to them that led these sheep to turn away from the water and shade and still abundant grass to browse on the stony hills where the sun was shining with almost noon-day heat.

Few if any of us in our spiritual experience live always 'in clover.' A continual pasturing beside 'still waters' is a type realized in few lives. But hours of refreshment, of restoration of soul beside the waters of rest, are common experiences, and it is a common experience also to have to turn away from such refreshment, to walk again in the paths of righteousness, to take up the practical duties of life, to bear the heat and burden of the day, to earn the daily bread for ourselves and those dependent upon us, often by scanty pickings and amid uncomfortable surroundings.[1]

And by 'still waters'? No, not always so;
Ofttimes the heaviest tempests round me blow,
And o'er my soul the waves and billows go.

But when the storms beat loudest, and I cry
Aloud for help, the Master standeth by,
And whispers to my soul, 'Lo, it is I!'[2]

[1] A. Walker, in *The Biblical World*, xvii. 432.
[2] Henry H. Barry.

His Name.

Ps. xxiii. 3.—'For his name's sake.'

This is the ground of the Psalmist's confidence. It is that on which he builds the certainty of his faith. We want to know what this corner-stone is upon which he rears so mighty a structure. 'His name's sake!' What's in a name that it should thus become a guarantee of all that he claims? Names with us are often mere vocables. We give names to our children simply because they are euphonious, or for the sake of perpetuating the memory of some ancestor. In this regard, however, we have receded sadly from the ideal. The very designation 'Christian name' as distinguished from 'surname' carried with it in its earlier bestowment the hope and expectation of a corresponding Christian character and career. To give a child its Christian name was thus to affirm its Christian status, and carried with it a pledge on the part of the parents to train that child for Christ. Would that we might recover the spirit of this ancient practice, and thus recharge it with the original significance for which it stood.

1. Names as bestowed in the Bible were expressive of character or office, and when a man's character or office was changed it was indicated by a change of name. Numerous examples might be given, but a few will suffice to illustrate the principle. Take the case of Abraham. His original name was 'Abram,' indicative of his moral and spiritual pre-eminence—literally, 'the high father, or the father of height.' When, however, on account of his superior moral fitness, he was selected to be the head of a great nation, God changed his name to 'Abraham,' which set forth his official character and signified 'the father of a multitude.' Jacob, whose name stood for cunning and trickery, underwent a great moral and spiritual crisis at Peniel, and from that hour he was called no more 'Jacob,' but 'Israel,' because as 'a prince he had power with God and prevailed.'

2. God has revealed Himself under many names, but each expresses some attribute of His character. What particular name does the Psalmist refer to in this verse? Clearly the name by which God revealed Himself to Moses, and with which this Psalm opens, viz., 'Jehovah,' translated in our version 'The Lord.' Literally translated, it is 'I Am.' Now one at least of the ideas sought to be conveyed by this wonderful name is that of self-existence, that is to say, independent existence. But if God be Independent Existence, then all other existence must be dependent, and this dependence carries with it certain claims which God, by the very assumption of this name, admits.

In Exod. xxxiv. God unfolds or renders explicit the ethical contents of His own revealed Name: 'The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.' Here, then, is the Psalmist's ground of confidence—it is laid in the moral character of God. Clearly God as Independent Being holds relations to all dependent beings. But relations everywhere carry obligations, not merely from the creature upward to the Creator, but from the Creator downward to the creature.

¶ Whence all the Psalmist's certainty, if not in the wondrous blank-cheque Name, 'Jehovah'? God, who in grace revealed His own unutterableness, could only perforce reveal Himself by a Name which ever confounds the grammarians of this world to translate. It was the Jew himself who best caught the Divine intention, when, as a nation, he resolved not even to pronounce the Name Jehovah at all. If the ineffable Name is *untranslatable,* said he, then let it be *unpronounceable.* Hence it is, the best translation in any language of that glorious Name will only be the best because it is the most unpretentious. So full of meaning, indeed, is the name Jehovah, that human speech can only call a halt, and translate it, blank-cheque fashion: 'I AM,' etc., etc.

If, says David, my Shepherd has such a blank-cheque Name—'I AM,' etc., etc.—then, indeed, *I, too, can issue a blank cheque* on the unknown future of life. How often we forget that 'I shall not want'—'is as much a blank cheque as Jehovah's own Name I AM! If God's name is 'I AM,' etc., etc., then Faith's echo-shout can obviously only be: 'I shall not want,' etc., etc.

Thus the deep of supply calleth out to the deep of need. If God does so challenge Faith as to His very name, 'I AM,' etc., etc., then Faith gladdens God's heart by sending back the sister-challenge: *'I shall not want,'* etc., etc. For when God declared His unutterable name to be I AM THAT I AM, what is this but just the modernised I AM, etc., etc.!

The whole eternity of God lies a great deep in that ineffable Name, and the responsive 'shall' is faith striking its roots deep into the eternity of God. Everlasting is His name, so 'shall' adorns the mouth of all God's children. We are the lords of the future, and another king can never arise who knows not Joseph.[1]

In One Name I have found the all in all.
It is enough, and It will never fail.
Here on the height, or there within the vale,
In this my strength I shall not greatly fall.
If on the dark hills here thy fears appal,
O thou mine Enemy! or there assail
My fainting heart, yet shall they not prevail,
For on the Name thou dreadest I will call.[2]

The Gloomy Valley.

Ps. xxiii. 4.—'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me.'

1. THE words of the text do not necessarily refer to death. The valley is not the valley of death, though death may come in the valley. The picture is that of the shepherd leading his sheep through the narrow and dark gorges, the haunts of wild beasts of prey, where unknown terrors may lie in wait. It is a valley of deep gloom through which they must pass. But the shepherd is with them all the time, and his presence is their stay and support.

[1] D. Crawford, *Thirsting after God,* 17.
[2] S. J. Stone, *Poems and Hymns,* 202.

¶ Standing on a hill-ridge in the Highlands, I have seen the mountain-tops, far and near, bright with the glow of the setting sun, while the valleys low down lay in dimness, almost darkness, and the sound of the stream, as it rushed along its rocky bed far beneath, seemed to come out of the gloom of midnight. I have seen the shadow creeping upwards towards a flock of sheep that whitened a high slope, and the shepherd with the aid of his dog rapidly gathering them and leading them to their place for the night, the shadow overtaking them before the shepherd's task was done.[1]

The expression rendered 'shadow of death' by the Septuagint, and so intended to be read by the scholars who pointed the Hebrew text, is really a single word having no connexion with death, but meaning 'dense darkness.' Indeed, this is necessarily the meaning of the phrase, whatever its origin. Doubtless the association of 'death' with the idea 'valley of the shadow' is too firmly fixed to be easily dissolved; yet a comparison of the passages in which the phrase occurs ought to have taught even the English reader that the words in Ps. xxiii. should not be joined 'the valley-of-the-shadow of death,' but 'the valley of the shadow-of-death. Thus in Job xxviii. 3, the miner is said to search out the shadow of death. In xii. 22, God is said to bring to light the shadow of death. In xxxiv. 22, 'There is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.' Again, in Amos v. 8, 'Seek him that . . . turneth the shadow of death into the morning and maketh the day dark with night.' Accordingly in the Twenty-third Psalm what is spoken of is the darkness of deep trouble. Has not the misunderstanding of this verse done much to foster the notion that the normal Scriptural view of death is that of a dark and gloomy passage? Doubtless to many it is so, but this is not a view to be encouraged. The survivors, indeed, have often most truly to pass through the valley of the shadow.

¶ I suppose the use of 'the valley' as a figure for death is solely due to this passage. As sometimes in hymns, *e.g.*—

> When we tread death's valley,
> Dark with fearful gloom.

If so, we have a curious instance here of service repaid. First of all, the expression 'the shadow of death,' in a casual use, serves to describe the gloom of a valley or mountain-gorge. And then by force of association in a familiar phrase, the dark valley becomes in turn a figurative expression for death itself.[1]

2. Few people entirely escape having to pass through this valley of deep gloom. Just as the night follows the day, so paths of darkness succeed paths of light. Divine manifestation and approbation at the baptism of Jesus were followed by forty days and nights in the wilderness with temptation from the devil. There are times when night gathers round the soul, if it be not in the soul. Nor is there anything haphazard about this. The shepherd *led* the flock through the gloomy valley. Then was Jesus *led* up of the Spirit to be tempted of the devil. Life was never intended to be all light. Lands of perpetual sunshine are lands of stagnation. The journey's end is never reached without some travelling in the dark:—

> The day is cold, and dark and dreary;
> It rains, and the wind is never weary.
> The vine still clings to the mouldering wall,
> But at every gust the dead leaves fall,
> And the day is dark and dreary.

Days like that we all know:—

> Into each life some rain must fall,
> Some days must be dark and dreary.

When we come right up to the entrance of that valley of deep gloom, with its dark and dreary days, what is our first sensation? Is it not that of fear? We are afraid of the unknown terrors along the journey. We may just as well admit it. There are very few absolutely fearless persons in the world. Fear is responsible for many failures and for much

[1] J. Culross, *God's Shepherd Care*, 96.

[1] J. S. Clemens, in *The Expository Times*, v. 288.

unhappiness. Have you ever made the acquaintance of Bunyan's Mr. Fearing, who was the uncle of Mr. Feeble-mind? He did not fail to reach the heavenly country, but he had a poor time of it along the journey. A most troublesome pilgrim this Mr. Fearing, both to himself and to others. It took him over a month to get across the Slough of Despond, and when one sunshiny day he managed to get over, he could scarcely believe he was over. Greatheart said he had a Slough of Despond in his mind. When he came to the Valley of the Shadow of Death, continues Greatheart, 'I thought I should have lost him; he was ready to die for fear. "Oh! the hobgoblins will have me," he cried. He made such a noise and such an outcry that, had they heard him, it was enough to encourage them to come out and fall on him.'

When we come to the entrance of the valley of the deep shade, how shall we feel? Like the Psalmist or like Mr. Fearing? 'I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.' The consciousness of the presence of God drives out the spirit of fear.

Happy, thrice happy, are they who have learned this sacred faith, this hallowed trust, 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me.' Shades we shall have to pass through, many, and gloomy. Yet we shall not fear; our Almighty Friend and Helper will be with us, and will fulfil His own assurance: 'Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned: neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.'

¶ I remember one spot in Switzerland which made a most lasting impression upon me. I heard there the most exquisite music it had ever been my lot to hear. I had never known the power of music before, never understood what a magician man could be. It was at Freibourg. The man sat at his wonderful organ, and called voices at his bidding from the divine heights and from the mystic deeps. There was a thunderstorm among the mountains. We could hear it march every moment nearer, until it culminated in a crash which made the cathedral in which we sat tremble. But across the storm we could hear a hymn—the sweet voices of women, and the sweeter voices of little children, clear, liquid, triumphant, until at last the storm died away into a peace like heaven; but the sweet voices still rang on. Now, that is like this Psalm. The thunder is here; the 'blackness of darkness,' the enemy, the scares, the fears, are here. But above everything the voice of faith is here; confident, victorious, thrilling with memories of unexpected restorations—deliverances which only a divine hand could have effected.[1]

3. It was never intended we should stay in the gloomy valley. We only pass through it on the way to brighter scenes and fuller life. We pass through to arrive at the city of light.

¶ In Mr. Eden Philpotts' book called 'The Fun of the Fair,' one of the characters utters these words: 'A family be like a flock of sheep that wanders over the hill-sides of the earth. Some have the upland for their part and some the meadows; some live long and some live short; some gather fatness of life, some move by stony ways and bitter waters, but the Master never loses sight of one. He is ever ready, watching and willing. To the last little lamb they shall all be gathered home to the fold when their Shepherd calls out of the evening shadows.' Yes, our Shepherd is with us; we need fear no evil. We shall safely emerge from the gloomy valley into the light of the hills, and find ourselves nearer to the great home where evening shadows never fall, where there is no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God doth lighten it.[2]

[1] J. D. Jones, *The Cup of Cold Water*, 27.
[2] W. A. Montgomery.

His Presence.

Ps. xxiii. 4.—'Thou art with me.'

BUNYAN says, 'When Christian had travelled in this disconsolate condition some considerable time, he thought he heard the voice of a man as going before him, saying, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for thou art with me"; then was he glad, because he gathered from thence that some that feared God were in this valley as well as himself; and for that he perceived God was with them, though in that dark and dismal state, why not, thought he, with me, though, by reason of the impediment that attends this place, I cannot perceive it?' It was Faithful who was going before Christian, and to whom he shortly made up, and Faithful told him he 'had had sunshine all through the valley.' So shall we have, if we are of the Faithfuls.

'Thou art with me.' We may interpret the 'Thou' either of God in Christ or of Christ Himself—the Son of God in our nature, who, as Mediator and Redeemer, is the representative of God in His shepherdly attitude and relation to men. There are several respects in which the Lord is with His people as their shepherd in the dark valley.

1. He is with them *in His providence.* John Calvin, in his beautiful commentary on the Psalms, makes a special note of this. In whatever way and at whatever time death comes to any of them, old or young, sheep or lambs of His flock, it comes as Christ ordered it. The sceptre of providence is in His hands, and these the hands that gave themselves to be pierced for them; from which no harm, and nothing but good, can be dispensed to them, living or dying. It is He who, at His own time, leads down into the valley, and He measures out its length, and metes out the spots and places in it, easier or more difficult, each of His flock has to traverse.

¶ I remember, when a lad of thirteen and going to a new school, my father, who accompanied me, stopped at the workshop of a fellow-craftsman to talk for a little. The talk turned to the case of a son of that friend, a lad about my own age, who had been drowned a week or two before, when bathing in the river at a spot called 'the Keath.' After other remarks the father of the lad said, 'I believe that, as God said to Moses, Go up to the mount and die there, so He said to my boy, Go up to the Keath and die there.' It was not mere fatalism; it was a right and Christian word, as he meant it; and a true word. God's providence, besides being in every death, is a covenanted and gracious providence in the death of all His children, whatever the manner of the death may be. The Divine Shepherd makes no false steps in leading His sheep down into the valley, and commits no errors in leading them through.

2. He is with them *in His promises,* ministered to them as reviving cordials when flesh and heart fail.

¶ In the *Spectator* recently there was an article on sleeplessness and ways of getting over it. After other cases the writer referred to a man he had met casually in the railway train. It was not so much sleeplessness that this man had been afflicted with, but a bad dream, constantly recurring from his youth up; a dream of falling, through bottomless space, so that he would wake up in terror, with the beads of perspiration on his face. Going to bed was a horror to him. At Craven Grammar School, when he was a boarder there, they sang at night—

> Teach me to live that I may dread
> The grave as little as my bed—

but to him it was a bitter irony, he dreaded his bed so much. How did he get over it? He was well on in manhood before he did so; but strolling one evening into a churchyard, he read on a stone, 'Underneath are the everlasting arms.' In a flash he saw his safety; he 'rested' he said, 'on the promise'; and from that time there had been with him a sense of physical comfort and security, besides spiritual, in which he could sleep serenely and sweetly. That is but one of the many promises

and assurances of God, but a very precious one; one which, if the Shepherd is with us in the valley, we shall have to rest on then, and which will be as effective in chasing away the horrors of death as it was in annulling those of a nightmare dream.

3. He is with them *in His power,* ensuring them as safe a passage through the valley as Israel got through the sea, and as sure a song on the other side.

¶ The author of the hymn 'Rock of Ages,' who himself died while yet young—he was only thirty-seven—sings thus to his soul in the prospect:

> Shudder not to pass the stream;
> Venture all thy care on Him,
> Him whose dying love and power
> Stilled its tossing, hushed its roar.
> Safe is the expanded wave,
> Gentle as a summer's eve;
> Not one object of His care
> Ever suffered shipwreck there.[1]

The Rod and the Staff.

Ps. xxiii. 4.—'Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.'

The hills of Judea are frequently reft by deep ravines or dismal gorges haunted by robbers and wild beasts; and the Wady el Haramiya between Bethel and Shiloh, is a fine example of a gloomy mountain glen in central Palestine, in whose sides still lurk the murderous robber and the beast of prey. In the spring of 1899 we rode from Ramah, through the Wady el Haramiya, to Shiloh. The morning was clear and bright. We discovered a steep rocky pass with clumps of flowering trees on either side. At the foot of the Pass, a narrow shady glen, with high sheer cliffs out of which water oozed and fed large patches of maidenhair ferns, ran for a mile or two. At night this glen would be very dark, lugubrious and lonely, and it would require a brave man to penetrate it. It is the Robbers' Glen, and the ruins of an old Crusaders' Castle stand just at the most dismal and gloomy part of it. We met in the glen, first a long string of camels laden with wheat, then two fierce looking Bedawin armed with guns, driving a donkey over whose shoulders lay a newly shot wild boar, dripping with blood. Then a wild boar ran out of the thickets on the east side of the glen, crossed the path before our horses' noses, and scrambled up the face of the western wall. Through such a black and dangerous defile the Shepherd had to lead his sheep. In the one hand he carried a rod or club to defend his sheep in case of attack: in the other, a staff for support and guidance. With the Shepherd going on before them, and ready to protect them, the gentle sheep followed fearlessly.[1]

The rod and the staff are the instruments of the shepherd. Two instruments are meant; not a staff which is also a rod, but the two, and these separated and emphasized in the mode of reference—'Thy rod, and thy staff, they comfort me.' In the case of a literal shepherd they meant a crook and a club. In Palestine shepherds still carry the two: a staff or crook, like that of our shepherds at home, and a rod or club, shod with iron sometimes, though in modern days a musket or rifle frequently takes the place of the club. The club is for defence against wild beasts and sometimes robbers; the crook, for drawing the sheep out of devious ways or dangerous places, guiding them aright, and keeping them together. For the sheep the two instruments meant defence and guidance, and, unitedly, safety. This being so, it naturally follows, 'they comfort me.'

Picture a flock passing down into some deep and dark ravine. As it becomes deeper and darker the sheep fear, and, supposing them to have intelligence, they would say, 'Shall we ever get through? Are we not going to be lost? May we not be devoured? May not robbers make a sudden sally from some recess, overcome the shepherd, and slay or carry us away?' But they look ahead, and see the shepherd walking calmly on; he is not afraid; he knows the way he is taking, he has an outlet in view,

[1] R. Cowan, *The Weakness of God*, 212ff.

[1] J. M. Scott, *Some Favourite Psalms*, 10.

and he is sufficient for all contingencies of the valley. He still carries his rod and his staff. If he threw these away, it would be saying, 'I give it up, I confess defeat, I abdicate my office, I am shepherd no longer.' But as they see him still walking serenely on, and carrying his rod and staff, they say, 'He is shepherd still, therefore we are safe; according to whatever of knowledge, skill, power, faithfulness belongs to our shepherd, we are safe.' Thus his rod and staff comfort them. And so, to us, the vision of Jesus as our Shepherd, and the faith of His sufficiency, will give confidence and comfort as we walk through the valley.

¶ November 16th.—Sunday.—'Generally in a solemn tender spirit. Spent the first half of the day in reading the Scriptures and prayer. Many a word was brought home with abundance of consolation to my soul. 'Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.' When do the sheep find the happiness of having a shepherd so much as when they are walking through a dark shadow? While Jesus lets me see His rod and staff I am comforted.'[1]

¶ 'Read those words again!' said the great American statesman on the last day of his life. The friend at the bedside repeated the Psalm. When he reached the fourth verse Mr. Webster raised his hand.

'Ah, that's it,' he murmured feebly, *'the rod and the staff!'* It is *the rod and the staff* that comfort a man at the last![2]

As I walk through the Valley of Shadows
No evil do I fear,
The Staff of Thy Love doth comfort me,
Thy rod itself hath cheer;
For they guide me with care to the pastures fair
Where the living waters flow,
Where the shadows give place to the Sun of Thy grace
And Thy Passion-Flowers grow.[3]

[1] J. Sargent, *Life and Letters of the Rev. H. Martyn*, 176.
[2] F. W. Boreham, *Wisps of Wildfire*, 21.
[3] J. Oxenham, *The Vision Splendid*, 34.

The Spread Table.

Ps. xxiii. 5.—'Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.'

'THIS is a desert scene,' says Dr. Jowett. 'A hot, panting fugitive is fleeing for his life, pursued and hunted by the forces of a fierce revenge. His crime is placarded on his garments. The marks of blood are upon him. In a moment of passion, or in cool deliberateness, he has maimed and outraged his brother. And now fear has spurred him to flight. Nemesis is upon his track. He takes to the desert. The wild, inhospitable waste stretches before him in the shadowless immensity. No bush offers him a secret shelter. No rock offers him a safe defence. He can almost feel the hot breath of his pursuers in the rear. Whither shall he turn? His terrified eyes search the horizon, and in the cloudy distance he discerns the dim outlines of a desert-tent. His excited nerves play like whips about his muscles, and with terrific strain he makes for the promised rest. The way is long! The enemy is near! The air is feverish! The night is falling! The runner is faint! Spurring himself anew, and flinging all his wasting resources into the flight, with the pursuers even at his heels, he stretches out toward the mark, and with one last tremendous exertion he touches the tent rope and is safe!'[1]

He sinks breathless at the shepherd's feet. And the stalwart and big-hearted son of the desert acknowledges his claim, and, standing club in hand over the prostrate form, defies the baffled foemen. He raises the trembling suppliant, conducts him within the open tent, sets him at table, and puts meat and drink before him, ratifying the covenant of hospitality in the very face of his enemies. Nay, he exceeds the guest-law's requirements. He does not simply admit the fugitive to his tent and bind himself to his protection by the bond of food. He welcomes him to his very heart and treats him as a dear and honoured friend. He anoints his head with oil. At ancient

[1] *The Silver Lining*, 83.

feasts that was a tribute of special courtesy; and when Simon, the Phraisee, desired to impress with a befitting sense of social inferiority the Prophet of the People whom he had honoured with a place at his proud board, he paid it to the other guests and withheld it from Jesus. Also he fills the fugitive's cup to overflowing; and that was another mark of honour, for in ancient days a large portion was a token of peculiar regard. Remember what Joseph did when, unknown to them, he entertained his brethren in Egypt. 'He took and sent messes unto them from before him: but Benjamin's mess was five times so much as any of theirs.'

1. Now Christ's is the only religion that spreads a table in the presence of its enemies. This is very remarkable, because there is no religion which hates sin like that of Jesus. The only faith that will admit to its table a guest with soiled robes is the faith that, of all others, desires purity. The Brahman must have the flesh crucified before the river of life joins the great sea. The Greek must have the flesh beautified ere earth can be an object of interest to heaven. The Roman must have the flesh fortified ere so weak a thing as man can be enrolled in the coming kingdom. But Christ accepts us for an inspiration, for a sigh, for a tear. He lets us sit down as we are, without one plea of present excellence. He lets us come to His Communion when we are beneath man's communion. All other teachers cry, 'Be ye cleansed and come'; He says, 'Come and be cleansed.' They tell me to put on the white robes that I may enter heaven; He bids me enter heaven that I may put on the white robes. They bid the prodigal reform, and he will be allowed to come back; He enjoins him to come back, and he will have a chance to reform. He prepares our table in the presence of our enemies.

2. It is the very essence of the Holy Communion that it is the ratification of a covenant, and it is a wondrous discovery of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that He should deign to enter into a covenant with us, frail and sinful children of men. And does not this impose upon us a sacred obligation? Our honour is at stake. We have bound ourselves by a double bond. We have made a covenant with Him by sacrifice and have been sprinkled with blood before His holy Altar. And we have eaten of His bread and drunk of His cup, swearing fidelity by this most tender sacrament. And He has accepted our pledges. He is trusting us. Shall we belie His confidence and disappoint His expectation? Shall we break our faith and lay our honour in the dust?

Lord, dost Thou me invite
To sit in white
At the great Feast which for Thy friends is spread?
I could not be so bold,
In raiment poor and old;
Rather without Thy gates would stand unfed.

Thy messenger mistook
My hungry look,
As claiming seat at table of the pure;
I am too wise to dare
My worthless presence there,
Nor could my spirit that clear light endure.

Hedge-rows for me instead,
Their berries red
Enough of sweetness for my lips contain;
The glow-worm is my lamp
'Mid herbage damp;
To tread Thy bright courts would be only pain.

Yet still He calleth me—
'Come, for I wait for thee,
It is the lost and hungry that I need;
Not luxury and pride,
Already satisfied,—
The humble and the poor My feast shall feed.'[1]

[1] J. E. A. Brown.

The Overflowing Cup.

Ps. xxiii. 5.—'My cup runneth over.'

My cup runneth over! Such is the measure of the bountiful hospitality of God. There is no leanness or meanness in His feasts. His provision is never scanty. His resources never come short of our necessity. Nor are they just level with our needs, leaving no margin of grace. The Divine Host welcomes His guests to overflowing bounty. 'In My Father's house there is bread enough and to spare.' My cup runneth over.

This magnificent fullness dwells in every promise of the Lord, and it gives radiant distinction to all the ministries of His love.

1. Look at my sin. It is the biggest thing I know. It is piled up like some gloomy, barren mountain in the landscape of my life. I can do nothing with it. If I set myself to the task of removal it is like yoking my weakness to the removal of a mountain, spadeful by spadeful, a helpless and a hopeless labour. And nobody else can do anything with my sin. My friends can pity me, but their pity does not redeem. They can ease my outer circumstances, but the ease is not the mother of vital peace. The awful mountain remains, and it mocks the finest resources of human friendship. It is the biggest thing I know, and I stand before it as impotent as a broken reed. I am like the Psalmist—'My strength faileth because of my iniquity.' But if the good Lord mercifully draws near to my sin, how then? Then my biggest thing is vanquished by something bigger, even by the wonderful grace of the Most High. 'Where sin abounds, grace doth much more abound.' It is like some parochial hillock set in the presence of the Himalayas. Nay, that comparison is ill suited to express the glorious might of the grace of God. I find a better comparison in some sandhill which children have been piling up on the shore throughout a long day; and God's great sea rolls in, wave upon wave, depth beyond depth, and in its majestic advance the hillock crumbles away, and is levelled with the sandy plain. Where the hill abounded God's vast sea doth much more abound. Sin finds its master in grace. The big thing can be buried in the bigger thing. And Divine grace is the only bigger thing that can ever be found. But the grace is so wonderful and so abounding that our sin is lost in its infinite depths as an unclean thing can be dropped in mid-Atlantic and buried in the depths of the sea. God's grace does not just measure up to our sin, it rises above it in overmastering grandeur. We are more than conquerors.

Thy mercy greater is than any sin,
Thy greatness none can ever comprehend:
Wherefore, O Lord, let me Thy mercy win,
Whose glorious name no time can ever end:
Wherefore I say all praise belongs to Thee,
Whom I beseech be merciful to me.[1]

2. And how is it with my common necessities—the care that pinches me, the sorrows that beset me, the lean circumstances which touch and chill me as with fingers of ice? How is it with human grief and pain? These are big and far stretching. They journey with man wherever man travels and wherever he dwells, whether it be among arctic snows or in the burning sun of the tropics. The gloom of sorrow is like the natural darkness, its circuit engirdles the globe. And where is the antidote to human suffering and sorrow? Who has the magic touch which can wipe away bitter tears? Where is the physician with wines and cordials in his wallet which can remove the heavy stuff that weighs upon the heart? Where do our doctors of sorrows live, the skilled practitioners who can dispel heartache, and chase away the grief that saps the mind? Who deals in the secret virtue that is the master of sorrow? Who has the bigger thing?

Only Christ has the bigger thing. 'Our consolations also abound in Christ.' Christ's consolations are not ministries which may or may not be equal to our griefs; they over-top them like great waters. Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal. There is no grief stand-

[1] W. Byrd, *Psalms, Sonnets and Songs.*

ing in insolent pride outside and beyond the consolations of grace. Our sorrows may abound, but Christ's consolations more abound. Thus it is that our sorrow is transfigured. In His grace our cup always runneth over.[1]

¶ He who is the great Consoler stands in the midst of a world distraught, unhappy, and helpless, bidding men come to Him for comfort in their distress. No other religion offers this gift so confidently as does Christianity. A poor Korean woman travelled far from her native village in search of the place where she had been told they heal the broken heart. She found it when she learnt about Him who ever speaks more comfortable words to mankind. His friends name Him Christus Consolator, and they know that He desires to give His comfort to all men, for across the ages they may hear His voice, 'Come unto Me . . . and I will give you rest.'[2]

Behind and Before.

Ps. xxiii. 6.—'Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.'

These beautiful words speak of life's retrospect and prospect from the point of view of religious faith. All the days of his life from childhood to age lie before the Psalmist as he sings: his days in the happy and shining fields of youth, his days of discipline and preparation for manhood, his days of labour and struggle in middle-life; days spent on bare and rocky mountains and in gloomy valleys; quiet days and troubled days, days of wandering and days of rest; days of innocence when sins were few and life was opening fair and beautiful; days of sinning and suffering—for sinning and suffering always go together—and of just retribution not unmingled with mercy.

1. The confession of our text is the quiet result of the Psalmist's retrospect of his life. From first to last, he says, goodness and mercy have followed him. In the green pastures and by the still waters of his youth, in the hard and stern paths of manhood, in valleys of shadow and in the presence of things apparently hostile, he saw through all one Divine Presence, one Divine care and one Divine purpose. The feelings that filled his heart were those of thanksgiving for the past and hope for the future. The experiences, gentle and bright, severe and troubled, glad and sorrowful, tender and terrible, were all parts of one hymn of praise; there was no difference and no discord between them. He discerned the goodness and mercy of God in them all. And in his old age, when the shadows of the inevitable night were seen stealing across his way, it was his joy to bear witness to the fidelity with which the Divine guidance had ever led him, to the watchfulness with which the Divine protection had ever shielded him. 'Let one more attest; I have lived, seen God's hand through a life-time, and all was for best.'

We do well to keep in mind 'all the days of our life,' and to lay to heart their lessons. This passing day may be dark and dreary, but we can recall the tender grace of days that are dead. The mist and the rain cannot blot out the memory of the blue sky and sunlight of yesterday. In the very depth and dreariness of winter we can remember the beauty and sweetness and gladness of the summer time, when every flower and running brook had a pleasant word for us. Memory may be a sanctuary where trouble cannot find us, a pavilion where God hides His beloved from the strife of tongues until the storm that is breaking over their heads is overpast. Beaten, overcome is what a man should never be. Let us do anything rather than dwell in darkness and yield to despair. Let us turn and wander back into our yesterdays and think how much we have enjoyed. Let us gather up all the bright memories of the vanished days, memories of the fair things which have been ours, memories of seasons when the light of God was upon our dwelling, and life with its strain and pain seemed worth living, and we felt our heaviest duties to be Divine opportunities. It is good to live in a grateful atmosphere! When we fail to find in the present enough to excite gratitude we can easily find it by wandering back into the past of our life.

[1] J. H. Jowett, *Springs in the Desert*, 48ff.
[2] *The Spirit of Man*, Selected Essays from *The Times*, ii. 217.

2. But the Psalmist is not only thinking of the past, he is looking forward to the future. He does not say 'goodness and mercy have followed me'; he says, 'goodness and mercy shall follow me.' His confidence is in the unchangeableness of the Divine goodness and mercy. As they had followed him all the days of his past life so they will continue to follow him all the days of his coming life. There is nothing in God that wears out; nothing that ever becomes exhausted; no goodness, no mercy, no pity, no love that lessens and dies. The suns rise and set. The seasons come and go. The years renew their course. But more steadfast than the course of Nature are the goodness and mercy which follow us. One of our hymns, a beautiful hymn of faith and hope, says, 'The changes that are sure to come I do not fear to see,' but there are few anywhere who have such trust and courage that they can sincerely echo these words. Many of us shrink from the changes that must sooner or later come into our lives, changes that are as inevitable as the coming of the sunset, and that no mortal hand can hold back. Amid all changes let us think of the unchangeable nature and character of God. His goodness and mercy are eternal, and they will follow us all our days. The future is not altogether a matter of speculation and uncertainty. What God has been in the days that are past, He will be in all the days to come. He who was good and is good will be for ever good. He blesses and will for ever bless. He cannot change.

¶ God is the same forever; but that sameness is neither monotonous nor passionless; it is the constancy of a sleepless enthusiasm for men. 'Goodness and mercy shall pursue me,' says the Psalmist. God's love is earnest, as earnest as the deadly battle-hate—for the Hebrew word means that.[1]

[1] J. E. McFadyen, *The Divine Pursuit*, 201.

God's Earth.

Ps. xxiv. 1.—'The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.'

'THE earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof.' Everything! Everybody! Every yard of ground! Every building raised on it! Every industrial operation man carries out! It is all God's, the same God who has revealed Himself in Love and Grace through Jesus Christ. We Church people are apt to shut God into one corner of life, and so we sometimes grow small and narrow. But the Psalmist comes to us, when our thoughts are of God's fields and His gift of harvest, and he cries—Not these alone, but everything, every field of human labour, every worthy task with which men busy themselves on this earth, it is all God's. He is a partner in it all. He has need of it all.

What a glorious truth to get hold of in these days when the world which our newspapers show us is such a perplexing place! If only, in our daily work, in industry and in politics, we made God our partner in homage and remembrance, as He is in fact and truth! If we 'remembered God,' as Tolstoi says, all of us who are working so literally with Him, what a different world this would be! Masters and men, if we realized that we are all God's servants and fellow-labourers, and that doing His will is the only road to happiness. The inadequacy of what is called Churchianity is that it seems to have no point of contact with such a thing, for instance, as a miner's strike. What has the God of the Churches got to do with wages or work in the mines, or the profits that the masters make? It is difficult to say. But there isn't any God of the Churches, and that is just the point. There is only One God, and He is Lord of the whole earth, and of all men's activity everywhere. And the mines, and the miners, and the masters are all His to begin with.

It isn't only the Church that is God's, and the Sabbath School, and the prayer meeting. It's the factory, and the forge, and the coal-pit, and the football field—these are God's too,

and we are not making half enough use of that blessed and wonderful truth!

We need to-day a vision of God that shall make all that is sacred in our experience more sacred still, that shall lift what we call the secular, and set it alongside that, and blot out the division between them. The world will not be redeemed from its godlessness so long as we make God the Lord of a corner of life only, which a man can neglect or avoid if he chooses. It is all His—Church and factory, Bible and news-sheet, Sunday and Saturday, prayer, work and play, it is all His. That is the beginning of wisdom. That is the doctrine that will make the world safe for democracy, and—what is quite as necessary—make democracy safe for the world. We remember God in the Churches, but we forget Him in the world. And it's all His! The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein. Somehow we must get that news to the great multitudes outside who are ignorant of it. The earth is the Lord's. And man's chief end is to glorify that Lord, and enjoy Him for ever.[1]

Founded on the Seas.

Ps. xxiv. 2.—'For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods.'

THESE words are traditionally associated with the story of the bringing of the ark to Zion, and the establishment of the throne of David in the conquered Jebusite city of Jerusalem. It is peculiarly interesting that Israel's creative idea should be introduced in this fashion on such an occasion. The object appears to have been to exhibit the theocracy as the great end and aim of creation, and thus to exalt alike the throne of David and the God of Israel.

The Psalmist, in his search for the foundations of the Kingdom of Israel, has gone back to those conceptions which are so charmingly described in the first chapter of Genesis. In that chapter we see God entering upon the chaos and the watery abyss of the beginning for the purpose of distinctions. He separates the light from the darkness, the heaven from the earth, and the dry land from the sea.

The earth, as the Hebrews thought of it, floats like a disc upon the surface of the seas, after the manner of an iceberg. 'The Great Deep' is literally the waters which are under the earth. To the Greek imagination the ocean was a river flowing round about the world, and in certain ancient maps this river is thus depicted; but the Hebrew conceived of it as a vast lake, not only around the disc of earth, but actually underneath it. As for the disc itself, in the submerged part of it there is located the great hollow of Sheol. This is an immense cave, the abode of the spirits of the dead. Above Sheol, on the surface of the disc, is the world we know, with man living his life upon it. Beneath all lies the Great Deep, whose waters are laid up there in the huge storehouses referred to in the Thirty-third Psalm. Into this bottomless Deep the roots of the mountains pierce down like anchors, holding the earth stable. It is to this region that the song of Jonah refers when the prophet says, 'I went down to the bottom of the mountains, the earth with her bars closed upon me forever.'

There was much in the geography of Palestine to confirm such a theory as this. All deep wells and springs (and there are many of them in Palestine and the neighbouring country) suggested a passage connecting down to the Deep. Also in certain places, like the Springs of the Jordan, you have full-bodied rivers, or at least considerable streams, suddenly emerging from the earth at some cave in a mountain-side, or even bubbling up from beneath in pools that lie on the plains. Most significant and striking of all are those underground waters of the Negeb, or south country, which are heard but never seen. The traveller, putting his ear to a crack in the ground in these regions, may so constantly hear the sound of running waters far beneath as to receive the impression that he is walking dry-shod above a vast network of river courses in the heart of the earth. It is no wonder if the Hebrews held this mysterious Deep in great

[1] A. Alexander, *By Sun and Candle-Light*, 103ff.

horror, calling it by strange names such as Dragon, Serpent, Rahab and Leviathan. They were land-dwellers who had no hereditary experience of the sea, and who associated with the conception of great waters all that was mysterious, remote from life, and horrible.

One thing especially is to be remembered about this curious cosmogony. It affords a good sample of the way in which scientific ideas arose in primitive times. All primitive physical science is really constructed upon the model of man's thoughts and feelings about life. When an ancient man writes, 'He hangeth the earth upon nothing,' we have an excellent expression of his sense of precariousness and insecurity. In many difficult times that is precisely how life feels—hung upon nothing, and in momentary danger of falling away into the abyss. So here, a man who feels the instability and uncertainty of his hold upon the life of the spirit may very naturally transfer these sentiments to the science which he is constructing.

And yet this earth, so precariously hung, is firm enough for man's uses. He can dwell upon it in safety, and walk to and fro upon his various business on its platform, and looking up from thence he can see the sun and moon and stars. This is indeed a sufficiently exact statement of our spiritual situation. In every way the life of man is still felt to be a thing of unstable equilibrium, insecure in the last degree, yet it may be lived steadily and with confidence. We swing forever over tremendous mysteries, and yet we can live our ordinary lives upon the platform on which we swing; and, looking up, we also may see the heavens and all their splendours. Thus the ancient cosmogony is a kind of metaphor for our spiritual life. It expresses the feel of life in a manner which most of us recognize and welcome. The literal truth of it is within the spirit of man, and every generation knows it. The resultant ancient view of the world and of the Great Deep is perhaps the finest figurative expression of a spiritual truth that ever has been or could be found.[1]

[1] J. Kelman, *The Foundations of Faith*, 13ff.

Climbing.

Ps. xxiv. 3.—'Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?'

The Bible conceives of life as either an ascent or a descent; men go up or go down. Those are the only options open to them—which, again, implies that, in the Bible view of it, life is not a level, it is a slope; it is not a flat, it is an inclined plane; it is not a meadow, but a hill-side. And the Bible view is eternally true.

1. This means that *there is danger and insecurity in life.* 'Ponder the path of thy feet,' says the wise man. 'Look therefore carefully how ye walk, not as unwise but as wise,' says the Apostle Paul. Look carefully! Examine the ground! See that your foot is planted on a safe spot! Get good standing ground! Look carefully (accurately, exactly) how ye walk.' And what lies at the back of the Apostle's urgency? The recognition that we are all living and walking on a slope. It is not along a 'soft and flowery glade' that we are travelling, but up a steep mountain-side, where a slip may end in destruction.

¶ I was in Zermatt one June. The time was full early for climbing. Most of us contented ourselves with sauntering about along the level, revelling in the profusion of flowers, and admiring the Matterhorn and the other white-robed giants from that safe distance. But some adventurous spirits, even while we were there, took the risk and climbed some of those mighty hills ribbed with ice and covered with snow. But I noticed what infinite precautions they took. They had specially nailed boots, they had ice-axes, they had ropes and they had guides. In the valley we could dawdle along in ordinary boots and without the help of any guide. But it was another and a different thing climbing the everlasting hills. When it came to climbing, nails, ice-axes, ropes, guides were absolutely essential. And the relics in the Museum, and the graves in the churchyards told us that, in spite of them all, the mountains took their toll. A slip, a false step on those icy slopes, and death was waiting to

snatch its prey. Well, that is what life is like—not a walk along the valley level, but a walk amid the ice and snows of the Alps. 'Look carefully how ye walk.' You are on the slope, and a false step may hurl you to your death.[1]

2. A second thing to be learnt is *the impossibility of standing still.* We cannot go on day after day, month after month, year after year, on the same level, for the simple but obvious reason that life is not a level at all. It is an inclined plane, it is a hill-side. There are really only two alternatives open to us, we must either go up or go down. For the moment we cease to climb, we begin almost insensibly to slip back. That is a truth men recognize frankly enough in the secular business of life. There is no such thing in business as marking time and standing still. Unless men are continually revising their methods, renewing their machinery, keeping everything up to date, they inevitably get left behind in the fierce scramble of business life. Progress is the very condition of existence. Unless a man gets on and up, he has to get out. It is not a bit of use for a man in business to think he can just sit down and take his ease. He is on a slope. And unless he is climbing up, it is morally certain he will slip back.

The man who is content with what he is and where he is, is already on the downward slope. That is the meaning of the old story of Thorwaldsen the sculptor. He had made a statue one day which his friends praised as perfect. And as they complimented him, he admitted he could see no fault or flaw in it himself. And then he burst into tears. His friends were amazed and staggered by his grief. But Thorwaldsen told them what it meant to him. Hitherto he had seen in every statue that had left his chisel something that could be improved, and so he knew that his best work was not yet done. But the fact that he could find nothing to improve upon in his latest work was proof to him that there was no further advance for him, but that artistically his feet were already on the downward slope. And Thorwaldsen thought truly. When a man realizes his ambition, he is on the point of being left behind. That is why poets and moralists urge men to high ideals. 'He builds too low who builds beneath the stars.' 'A man's reach must exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?' It must be 'up and onward' with us for evermore. And if we are not struggling upward, there is that within us which, with the relentlessness of gravitation, will drag us down into shame and failure and contempt.

3. Another lesson we should learn is that *there is no growth in goodness without struggle and strain.* The good things, the best gifts, the real riches—they are all 'on high.' To dwell with God we must still climb the hill. And climbing is never easy. The Bible is perfectly frank about it. Every figure it uses to describe the life of holiness and service to which it summons us is a figure which implies effort and struggle. Recall some of them. 'Strive to enter in at the strait gate,' said Jesus. 'Strive'—but that word is not strong enough! This is what Jesus said, 'Agonize to enter in at the strait gate.' There is effort almost to the point of blood at the very start. Listen to another word of our Master's: 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.' Let him take up his cross! That does not suggest a pastime! It suggests a load, a burden, a terrific struggle. Listen to a word or two of the Apostle: 'Suffer hardship' with me, he cries, 'as a good soldier.' Life is not a parade, but a battle; it stands not for comfort, but for conflict. The man who enlists for the brave and holy life must make up his mind for hardship and weariness and wounds. 'Exercise thyself unto godliness,' says the Apostle. But again the word 'exercise' does not reproduce the vigour of the Apostle's thought. Literally, it runs: 'Gymnastize thyself unto godliness.' Whoever would live godly has got to strip for the business. It is an athlete's life, with its severe and rigorous training, and its hard and exhausting effort, that he is in for.

[1] J. D. Jones, *The Gospel of the Sovereignty*, 278.

¶ We buried a young officer of the Rhodesian Government, Stanley Worth by name, in our cemetery not long ago, with an almost heart-breaking sorrow that one so young and so useful should be so unexpectedly taken from us, and yet at the same time with a sense of exultation and triumph. For this is what he had been all through his brief life—a fighter, a wrestler, a climber. 'I never knew,' he wrote to me from Africa, 'what the church and home meant until I came out here; I am doing my best to keep my head on to temptation and sin, but it's mighty hard work.' His head on! that was it. His eyes towards the summits. And how bravely and successfully he did it, I have heard Christian doctors who laboured out in that land say. Stanley Worth did not drift or slip or glide. He kept his 'head on' to temptation and sin. He did not seek ease. He accepted the hard life. He was a 'climber,' a 'fighter' from start to finish. And that is why we felt that curious sense of exultation as we buried him. We felt we were burying a hero. We felt we were burying one who had lived his life out, and fought his fight, grandly, splendidly, magnificently.[1]

How is that soldier's valour seen
  Which ne'er hath been
In fight? they scarce true soldiers are
That have no wound to show, or scar.

Except we fight, there is no crown
  And no renown;
Unless we sweat in the vineyard,
  There's no reward:
Unless we climb Mount Calvary,
Mount Olivet we shall not see.[2]

4. We *are judged by the direction in which our faces are turned* and our steps are tending. We are measured and tested by ambition and intention and desire rather than by achievement. This is what really tests men; this is what separates them into sheep and goats; this is what sets them on the right and the left, whether they are looking up or down, whether their faces are set towards the summit or the base. A soldier falls in battle; it is how he lies that tells whether he fell as a hero or as a coward. If the wounds are all in front, if he falls with his face to the foe—then he proclaims himself a hero. If his wounds are in the back, then he proclaims himself a coward, he fell in the act of flight. And it is so in the moral world. It is the direction in which we look that decides our character. That is why so much stress is laid in the Bible upon the 'look.' 'Look unto me, and be ye saved' is the appeal. 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills' is the response. 'There is life for a look' is the comment made upon these things by a modern hymn-writer. And though it is quite possible to interpret such a statement falsely, properly understood it is profoundly true. We are saved by looking. The man who 'looks' unto God is a saved man. For that 'look' means that he is a climber, a struggler, that his face is set on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Our look is a revelation of character. That is how God will judge us—whether our eyes are up or down, up towards the stars, or down to the slime and the beast. That is what will decide our destiny—whether, when we fall, we fall face towards the summit, or face towards the base.

¶ The personal note is heard throughout Dante's poem. It is not a work in which a great poet's vivid imagination plays over a theme of world-wide interest; it is a personal record. The pilgrimage he takes was no mere excursion of the imagination; it was a stern necessity. Only in such a stern experience could his soul reach emancipation. He tried to climb the sunlit hill of perpetual gladness: its heaven-kissed height seemed to beckon him. It was the hill of the Lord, upon whose summit the divine light for ever shone: but none could climb that hill whose hands or hearts were stained with wrong. 'Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?' the Psalmist had asked, and the Psalmist answered his own question: 'Even he that hath clean hands and a pure

[1] J. D. Jones, *The Gospel of the Sovereignty*, 283.
[2] A. Rosse.

heart.' Obstacles always arose in the path of the guilty. Dante tried to climb, and he met with invincible difficulty. For a time he had hopes of success: the morning shone brightly, the distant hill seemed to smile in the early light, the gay creature which appeared to hinder his steps was but a playful hindrance; but presently the air trembled, a more majestic beast stood across his path, and lastly, the lean and hungry wolf drove the poet step by step towards the darkness he thought that he had left behind. The straightforward way is closed to him; so he is told that for him there is another path.[1]

The Hill of the Lord.

Ps. xxiv. 3, 4.—'Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.'

O Thou whose voice proclaims Thy changeless will,
Imperial as Thy grace,
Who shall ascend unto Thy holy hill,
And stand before Thy face?

No strength of soul can that clear height attain,
Nor pride for sin atone;
And sacrifice uplifts its hands in vain
To plead at Mercy's throne.

But he whose hands, O Christ, are brotherly,
And, like Thine own, are just;
Whose feet through lowly ways have walked with Thee
In humble, child-like trust;

He shall ascend unto Thy holy hill,
And dwell with Thee above;
For though Thy statutes are imperious still,
Thy law, O God, is love.[2]

It is more than accidental that the Twenty-third and Twenty-fourth Psalms are found in immediate proximity. The one most fittingly leads to the other, and they ought to be read together.

¶ I know a little woodland path where the feet tread upon the softest turf, and which is fringed in spring with the primrose and the wild hyacinth and the anemone, and where every few yards one comes upon the nest of a blackbird or a thrush. But suddenly the lovely path emerges upon a vast and awe-inspiring panorama of great hills and far-stretching plains! And these two scenes are always recalled to my mind when I come upon these two inspiring Psalms. In the one I walk through 'green pastures' and 'by still waters' but it leads on to a sublime and overwhelming contemplation of the majesty of God. The 'green pastures' and 'the still waters' give place to 'the seas,' 'the floods,' the 'hills of the Lord.' 'My shepherd' becomes 'the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle!' It is not that the two are incongruous; they are complementary, and each perfects and glorifies the other. The Twenty-third Psalm is a fitting portal to the Twenty-fourth. 'Through the door of mercy we enter into the throne chamber of the King.'[1]

¶ 'It is more difficult,' says one, 'to live the Twenty-fourth Psalm than to sing the Twenty-third, and it is just as religious.' Let it be my daily endeavour to 'live the Twenty-fourth Psalm,' and every night I shall find myself a little further up the slopes of the Mount of God. Resolve with good Bishop Hall: 'I will be content to pant and blow and sweat in climbing up to heaven.[2]

1. 'Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?' Let us mark at once that it is possible to do both. The suggestion is not that nobody can climb the steep hill, but that it is within the attainment of everybody if only the requisite conditions are observed. The verse unfolds the soul's possibility, it discloses the human reach. It is possible for us to draw near to

[1] W. B. Carpenter, *The Spiritual Message of Dante*, 227.
[2] L. F. Benson, *Hymns and Verses*, 20.

[1] J. H. Jowett.
[2] S. L. Wilson, *Helpful Words for Daily Life*, 149.

the Almighty, and to abide in His most holy presence.

(1) 'Who shall ascend?' The spiritual life is always uphill work. There is no other suggestion in the Word of God. The Christian life is always depicted as a climb into hill country, the scaling of mountain heights. The Bible is ever seeking to lift our eyes away from the commonplace. 'Set your affections on things above.' Let no one turn to the life of the spirit imagining that he will be able to walk its ways in the mood of indolence and ease. He is turning to the hill-country, and the ascent will demand persistent toil and prayer. But there is another suggestion implied in the descriptive word of our text. The 'ascent' suggests that spiritual maturity is only gradually attained. We do not step from the base to the summit in a day; we reach it step by step. But then every step prepares us for the next step, and contributes its own inspiration to our enterprise. In this mountaineering the strides are not exhausting; each stride increases the capital of our strength. Every step enlarges the view! And so it is in the life of the Spirit—the panorama is continually unfolding, and the revelation is full of quickening power. Compare the earliest of St. Paul's letters with, say, the Epistle to the Philippians, and note how immeasurably widened is the outlook. Between the two he has been ascending 'the hill of the Lord' and the visions and vistas have been immeasurably enriched and glorified. We 'grow in grace' and therefore 'in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' There is much to inspire us even as we climb. Even before the final attainment, the Lord of the way provides rich nutriment for His aspiring pilgrims.

(2) 'Who shall stand in his holy place?' That, too, is within human reach and possibility. In some departments of life it is possible to arrive and yet be unable to stand. It is possible to slip away from the heights. It is quite possible to get into a position and to lose one's head in it. 'They who stand high have many blasts to shake them.' But the significance of the text consists in this, that in the life of the Spirit heights gained can be held by the enabling grace of God. He shall keep thy feet from falling. This, too, is a glorious possibility. We can all ascend the hill of the Lord, and we can retain the sanctification which we win in the strength of His grace.

¶ The record of his [St. Columba's] life which Adamnan gives, informs us that 'he was brought up from boyhood in the Christian faith, and by the grace of God has so preserved the integrity of his body and the purity of his soul that, though dwelling on earth, he appeared to live like the saints in heaven.'[1]

2. Now comes the description of those who are accounted worthy to cross the threshold and to be the guests of the Almighty. 'He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.' Three things are mentioned, and yet they are only one. Let us take these statements and look at them a little more closely. The two extremes refer to the outer life—'clean hands,' 'not sworn deceitfully.' The inner statement describes the interior life—'a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity.' The requisite conditions are therefore purity of hand, which means purity of deed; purity of lips, which means purity of speech; and purity of heart, which means purity of desire.

(1) *Purity of Deed.*—'He that hath clean hands.' So much depends upon the hands that bring the gift to God. Many a gift is spoiled by the hand that brings it. In all sacrifice the sacrificial element is far more in the clean hands than in the bulky offering. When we draw near to God His eyes are fixed upon the character of the hand, and not upon the size of the gift. 'If thou bring thy gift to the altar,' and thy hand is not clean, 'leave there thy gift,' go, get the hand right, 'and then come and offer thy gift.' God sees the record of our deeds upon our hands, and a fine offering is no atonement for our defilement.

[1] T. H. Walker, *Saint Columba*, 24.

The choicest dish, when offered with unclean hands, arouses no appetite, no expectant delight. And let us reverently say it is even so with God. It is not what we bring that is well pleasing unto God; it is the character of the bearer that brings delight. If we are to stand in the holy place we must have clean hands.

¶ Lincoln's practice went to the very limit of what is permissible in refusing legal aid to a cause he disapproved. Coming into court he discovered suddenly some fact about his case which was new to him but which would probably not have justified an English barrister in throwing up his brief. The case was called; he was absent; the judge sent to his hotel and got back a message: 'Tell the judge I am washing my hands.' One client received advice much to this effect: 'I can win your case; I can get you 600 dollars. I can also make an honest family miserable. But I shall not take your case, and I shall not take your fee. One piece of advice I will give you gratis: Go home and think seriously whether you cannot make 600 dollars in some honest way.' [1]

(2) *Purity of Speech.*—'Who hath not . . . sworn deceitfully.' The Lord sees the lie upon the lips as we sometimes see the stain of fruit upon the lips. All speech leaves its record. It is little or nothing that we come to God with swelling expressions of praise. Such may not be our speech at all. Our real speech may be of quite another kind. We may be using the words of the saints while our lips are black with falsehood. And in this relationship let us remember that there are no such things as white lies. White lies leave black marks. And let us also remember that among the falsehoods most condemned in the Book of the Psalms is the deceit of flattery. 'The Lord shall cut off all flattering lips.' A man with unclean lips can find no entrance into the holy place. It is not his Father's house. 'Ye are of your father the devil . . . for he is a liar and the father of it.' This is an awful word of the Master, and it will deepen our reverence for truth to remember it. When we are offering our prayer the Lord is looking at the lips.

Lie not; but let thy heart be true to God,
Thy mouth to it; thy actions to them both:
Cowards tell lies, and those that fear the rod;
The stormie working soul spits lies and froth.
Dare to be true. Nothing can need a ly:
A fault which needs it most, grows two thereby.[1]

(3) *Purity of Desire.*—'A pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity.' Here we are taken into the realm of desire. We are led into the deepest places of life, where the eyes of the soul are lifted up in craving. We are standing where action is born, for all actings begin in lookings, all movements begin in desire. We should know everything about a man if we knew on what his secret desires were fixed. How is his soul lifted up? What is it gazing upon? Mere vanities? Vain and puffed up things like bubbles? Glittering emptinesses, idols made out of wind? Or upon the things that endure? Presences that abide? The Eternal Himself? In other parts of the Psalms we are permitted to gaze upon the pose of the soul. 'Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul!' 'As the heart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God!' 'One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after . . . to behold the beauty of the Lord!' Here we are in the realm of deepest desire, and it is into this realm that our Saviour takes us when He says, 'Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness.' It is when these secret cravings are pure and elevated that the outer life is lofty and clean. And it is the man with hidden desires of this kind who is accounted fit to cross the threshold into the 'holy place.' These are the folk who are to be welcomed among the companions of God. They are to be laden with heavenly bounty. 'He shall receive a blessing from the Lord.' His Divine Sonship is to be recognized and the Father's

[1] Lord Charnwood, *Abraham Lincoln*, 105.

[1] George Herbert, *The Temple*.

grace will rest upon him in heavenly benediction.

¶ You can always take a man's true measure by the nature of the things which he is seeking. There is indeed no surer way, for here is laid bare the very texture of his soul. Here is to be seen, as in a daring apocalypse, his soul's proportions, its depths and its power. What is the end which he sets before himself? What is the goal which draws him with the power of a deathless attraction? Where is his face set and where abides his heart? These are the things through which he can see himself, and by which he is so certainly revealed to others. If a man is seeking little things, things that are perishable—a pot of beer, a pack of cards, a handful of money, a path of dalliance, a little, temporary, premature heaven—he is a little man. But if a man is seeking some great thing, a thing that will outlive the sun and quench the pomp of gorgeous stars—a good heart, a noble character, a finely tempered will, a whole life completely accordant with God's holy purpose, an eternal heaven that stands in the excellence of Christ—he is a great man. Nothing can falsify that appreciation, nothing destroy that appraisement. Desires declare the man. He is to-day what he wishes to be. The aim, the purpose, the intention, realized or not, make great the life; and in their shining the life stands revealed in its real proportions and plan, clothed already with glory or covered with shame.[1]

Lord, grant us wills to trust Thee with such aim
Of hope and passionate craving of desire
That we may mount aspiring, and aspire
Still while we mount; rejoicing in Thy Name,
Yesterday, this day, day by day the Same:
So sparks fly upward scaling heaven by fire,
Still mount and still attain not, yet draw nigher,
While they have being, to their fountain flame.[2]

[1] G. B. Austin, *Beautiful Gates in Life*, 120.
[2] Christina G. Rossetti, *Poems*, 265.

The Divine Entrance.

Ps. xxiv. 7.—'Lift up your heads, O ye gates.'

This Twenty-fourth Psalm was deemed of such spiritual value that it was sung every Sabbath Day in the Jewish worship. It has been fittingly termed the Psalm of the Ascension. Like so many of the Psalms, it is divided into distinct parts.

1. First we have the clear statement that 'the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof. He hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods.' That the land has appeared in the midst of the waters might well awaken our adoration. To those of us who have lived wholly on the land it may appear that it could not have been otherwise. But anyone who has crossed the lonely Atlantic or braved the storms of the Southern Pacific will admit that that appearance of the land is one of the miracles of creation, and that, apart from the land, man, as we know him, would never have had a conscious existence. Man is the product of the land. He is formed, we have been taught, out of the dust of the ground, and God 'breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.' It is the fact, then, that God has created the land that awakens the Psalmist's praise. 'He hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods.'

2. In the second division the writer asks, 'Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?' And the answer is given: 'He that hath clean hands and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.' The essential idea here is uprightness of character. This conception is emphasized again and again throughout the Scriptures. Whatever strictures may be passed upon our current theological conceptions, it is impossible for anyone to read the Bible, and to read it honestly, without being convinced of the passionate desire for righteousness that is manifested in its pages, the desire that in all

the world and in the several relations between man and man there shall be fair play, which is the equivalent of righteousness, that men and women shall leave behind them their sordid ideals and rise to a higher spiritual plane on which will be revealed their true manhood and womanhood. Such was the idea in the Psalmist's mind when he exclaimed, 'This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob.'

3. And this leads us to the last division of the Psalm. It has been suggested that it was the entrance of the ark, the symbol of the Divine Presence, into the city of Jerusalem that formed the occasion for the composition of this Psalm. Many of the ancient gates were in the form of a portcullis which could be let down or lifted up, and hence the highly poetic figure, 'Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.' It was as if the gates of the city were to be fully opened, so that an abundant entrance might be given to the Lord of Hosts. It was as if the doors that had been closed for years were to spring aloft at His approach. There was to be as little doubt regarding the royalty of the welcome as there was regarding the august Personality that was to enter in.

Hence it is that this Psalm has been called the Psalm of the Ascension, for we can see how easily this language can be transferred to Jesus Christ. In a high spiritual sense can it not be asserted that the doors of the everlasting kingdoms were thrown wide open before Him; that He indeed is the King of Glory before whom all earthly potentates must bow? It is the Ascension of our Lord that is so vividly recalled to our minds by the language of this Psalm. To no earthly potentate could these words be applied. But this language brings before our minds that Christ who is King of kings and Lord of lords, God over all, blessed for ever. In the fact of our Redeemer's Ascension we find the vision of the Psalmist magnificently realised. 'Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.' [1]

Lift up your heads, great Gates, and sing,
Now Glory comes, and Glory's King;
Now by your high all-golden way
The fairer Heaven comes home to-day.

Hark! now the Gates are ope, and hear
The tune of each triumphant sphere;
Where every Angel as he sings
Keeps time with his applauding wings,
And makes Heaven's loftiest roof rebound
The echoe of the noble sound.[2]

True Religion.

Ps. xxv. 1.—'Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.'

Man is well-nigh everywhere religious. The religion may be base; the idea it suggests of God may be low and false; the worship may be hideous, even immoral; its sacrifices may be foolish, degraded, cruel, profligate. But even in the worst there is a pathetic undertone, like the moan of a wounded animal: for in all his religions man is groping after his Father. He is yearning with a deep inherited instinct for the God who made him, 'if haply' he may 'feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us.' It is the same with the highest efforts of human philosophy: their aim is the beautiful, the true, the one—in a word, God. Man was made to love God, and he will never be satisfied without Him. And from all humanity there rises the echo of St. Augustine's great saying—which he put in the forefront of his 'Confessions'—as he begins to relate the chequered experiences and turmoil of his life: 'Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless until it repose in Thee.'

1. The earliest need man felt was naturally that for food and shelter, for protection against foes of famine and pestilence, darkness and storm, or the often more pressing

[1] J. Lamond, *The Eternal Christ*, 216f.
[2] J. Beaumont.

enemies of hostile tribes. What, under these conditions, was the test of religion? The religion that brought victory over enemies, that brought health, that gave good luck in the hunt or sent the rains that made the land yield her increase, that guarded from the pestilence in darkness or the destruction at noonday—this was the religion man craved in early times. Greek or Semite, American Indian or Australian black tested his religion by its ability to give such help. The god that answereth by fire, he is the god; the Lord of Hosts is the helper. And the test works both ways: the man who prospers in all these ways is sure that the Lord is with him. Success is the test of piety and faith; calamity or defeat is evidence of sin, or of failure to unite forces with God.

This religion broke down at two points. It broke down as a means of getting Nature's aid or as a protection against the dangers from Nature and man. It did not give the worshipper sure harvests or safe voyages. The flight of birds or the freshly opened bodies of victims failed to inspire confidence as revelation of God's will. Asshur did not protect Nineveh, nor Bel Babylon, nor Jehovah Jerusalem, nor Athena Athens. And finally the Eternal City of Mars, of Jove, and of all the pantheon was sacked.

And on the other hand, the man who sought to follow the guidance of right in his relation to his fellows—he likewise might fail to gain the blessing of God. Though he gave his bread to the fatherless and upheld justice in the gate he might perish. Which, then, should he trust—conscience or religion? In such a crisis many would stand by the older view of religion and go after any who promised prosperity. But a Job would hold fast to his integrity, and an Amos and a Hosea would find a new religion, which put justice and mercy before sacrifice.

2. Corresponding to that aspect of religion which sought to control Nature through magic or mystic union there emerged the methods of scientific thought. Astronomy began to guide the sailor, medicine to understand and sometimes to heal disease. Mathematics was for Plato a surer path to the divine than the religious myth of the poets. The life of plants and animals, the practice of the creative artisan or creative poet gave Aristotle his clue to the nature of God; and, above all, the splendour of the new world rose into man's vision. The universe lay open to him who had the key of logical method. It was a universe of order, of law, of consistent reason.

For more than a thousand years, though submerged from time to time by waves of ignorance, this seemed to many of the choicest minds the true realm of religion. Reason is man's diviner life, say Plato and Aristotle, St. Thomas and Spinoza. In comparison with this, the life of sense belongs to our animal and mortal part. Let man put off his mortality and find God in the immortal and changeless realm of thought. Let him find the beatific vision in the contemplative life. Let him view all things under the aspect of eternity. Nor can we forget the eloquent words of the modern expounder of this view: 'In religion we withdraw from what is temporal—religion is for our consciousness that region in which all the enigmas of the world are solved, all the contradictions of deeper-reaching thought have their meaning unveiled, and where the voice of the heart's pain is silenced—the region of eternal truth, of eternal rest, of eternal peace.' Religion of this sort finds in God a cause, a substance, an absolute. It seeks to view all things from the standpoint of eternity. Its test is that of logical consistency.

3. While the thinker seeks to rise above the world of sense on wings of thought, another pilgrim climbs step by step a stony path to the divine. Not the illusions and perplexities of the universe, but the passions and lusts within the soul, vex and baffle him. 'Satan' symbolizes an adversary more active and dangerous than 'Chaos.' Persian, Indian, Greek, and Christian seek helper and companion in these conflicts. The way upward is steep, but it too, no less than the soaring flight of reason, yields visions. The higher world of

God lies beyond, and a Saint Bernard catches glimpses of its splendour. For such a religion, desires and passions, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life, are the deadly foes. They blind the vision; they fetter the aspiring soul; they shut him away from God. Only by freeing himself as far as may be from these can he enter the presence of the pure and holy. Fast and vigil, poverty, chastity, renunciation, mortification of the body—these form the *via crucis*, which is the *via lucis*. And for the saint of this type of religion the test will be: Have I completely escaped the vanities and deceptions of this sham world? Have I ceased to lust and to will? Have I merged and hid my life in God, and does His spirit in turn give me victory over the world of the flesh and of desire? This is the ascetic's test.

4. There followed the political and social ideal. National hopes gave rise in the heroic souls of Israel's seers to a grander vision of a kingdom of righteousness not limited to the sons of Abraham. Yet it needed the complete destruction of the earthly Jerusalem and the opposition of the little group of Christian disciples, alike to their old countrymen and to Roman power, to prepare the way for a union and co-operation of man and his fellows for a purely spiritual end. The older faiths had been national. The essentially new in the idea of the church was that it represented unity of man with man in God. And when Augustine saw the Roman imperial power disintegrate he hailed the coming City of God as the destined end of creation. The Church became the earthly way of entrance to this city. Its universal catholic sway embraced the faithful. The test of religion for the individual became obedience to its rule. The test the anxious soul propounded was: Have I been blessed through its sacraments, absolved through its divine commission, included in its saving fold?

5. When the modern world came in, religion, like other forms of human experience, took a more individual and personal attitude. Personal accountability to God, personal faith, personal salvation, personal regeneration and penitence, an inner light within the soul—these became notes of true religion. With most men there was no intellectual question as to the existence and sovereignty of God. The question was rather as to man's own conscious attitude toward his Creator, Lawgiver, Judge, and Redeemer. The cry of the Psalmist, 'Let me not be put to shame,' as it was repeated by our fathers, sprang from fear that they might be put to shame because of their own deceitful hearts.

As we read the writings of Edwards and his followers, or of Wesley and his school, we can but appreciate the fervour and intensity of feeling which dwelt within them. It offers a parallel to the emphasis laid upon the affections by the 'moral sense' school of contemporary ethical writers. It was perhaps favoured by special external conditions which turned the spirit within upon itself. Although the Calvinists conceived God primarily as governor of the universe—of a universe, moreover, in which the great majority of men were through another's act in hopeless enmity, and under certain condemnation to endless misery—they none the less looked for a type of affection appropriate to personal relations. If the object of affection was the divine-human Saviour there might be an even more vivid imagery and emotion. In their fear of an external religion of works, or a selfish religion of gain, men of spiritual temper sought in the 'exercises,' or 'taste,' or 'experience' of the individual soul the supreme test of the work of God within.

6. Do we not find the true religion when we combine the last two? For while the whole scientific spirit of our day urges us to seek what is real and vital in concrete facts of some experience, rather than in general concepts, recent science also says that social co-operation is necessary. Religion expresses the fact that the deepest spiritual nature is social. Where two or three are met the divine presence is with them. The test of membership in this co-operative union was indeed misapplied when it was taken as a substitute

for the others, or when the special ecclesiastical organization, built as it was from Roman empire and oriental magic and Gothic rites, was identified with the spiritual temple. But the test of co-operation, of union in spiritual sympathy and purpose, of loyalty to the cause of the Kingdom of God, of active participation in the efforts to make this Kingdom come—this is a modern test.

> See! In the rocks of the world
> Marches the host of mankind,
> A feeble wavering line.
>
> Factions divide them, their host
> Threatens to break, to dissolve.
> Ah, keep, keep them combined!
> Else, of the myriads who fill
> That army, not one shall arrive.[1]

Sins of Youth.

Ps. xxv. 7.—'Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions.'

'The Twenty-fifth Psalm,' says Ruskin,[2] 'is one of the most precious in the Psalter, written in prolonged depression of heart under memory of sin; and it is more sweet and wide in its sympathy with all human error, and acceptableness by the feeble heart and trembling lips of common persons, than the Psalms of more violent and bitter repentance.'

¶ It was the Twenty-fifth Psalm that Lord Strafford, the minister of Charles I., read on the scaffold in the sight of the crowd who had assembled to see him die. 'Gentlemen,' he said, to the noblemen and friends who stood on the scaffold beside him, 'I would say my prayers, and I entreat you all to pray with me and for me.' Then his chaplain, Dr. Carr, laid a Book of Common Prayer on the chair before him, and he kneeled down and prayed on it 'almost a quarter of an hour,' finally repeating aloud the words of the Twenty-fifth Psalm.

It was the Twenty-fifth Psalm also that the younger of the Wigtown martyrs, in the time of the Scottish Covenant, sang with her latest breath. There were two women who would not take the test and forswear the Solemn League and Covenant, and who were therefore doomed to death by drowning, Margaret Wilson and Margaret Maclachlan.

'Up the deep channel of the sluggish Blednoch,' says a recent account of this event, 'with its steep and sloping mudbanks, twice a day sweeps the sea, with its yellow tide. Stakes were set in the ooze of the river bank, to which the two women were tied. The elder woman, Margaret Maclachlan, was set lower down the river, that the younger sufferer might see her struggles and her course finished before she herself was reached by the rising sea. Pitying her youth, the executioners tried to save Margaret Wilson. As the water swirled about her body, she was drawn to the edge of the bank and offered her life if she would say "God save the King," and take the test. She was ready to say "May God save the King, if He will," for she desired, she said, the salvation of all men; but she would not forswear the faith nor take the test. So she was once more secured to the stake and left to her fate. With her fresh young voice, as the salt waves curled above her breast and all but touched her lips, she sang the Twenty-fifth Psalm:

> My sins and faults of youth,
> Do Thou, O Lord, forget;
> After Thy mercies think on me,
> And for Thy goodness great;

and so continued singing until her voice was choked in the rising tide.'

This statesman and soldier, Lord Strafford, known in his lifetime for his stubborn and unflinching courage, and dying in a political quarrel; and the girlish martyr in the first flower of her womanhood, dying for the faith as she understood it—both alike, at the last pass, find the old familiar words better than any others; and, in praying to be delivered from the troubles that compass them round, pray also for forgiveness for the past.[1]

[1] J. H. Tufts.
[2] *Rock Honeycomb.*

[1] E. H. Eland.

1. We see from the words of our text, where 'the sins of my youth' and 'my transgressions' are named separately, that it is not only the sins that come of the weakness and thoughtlessness of childhood which the writer has in his mind, but also the deliberate rebellions of later life—sins against the light, deliberate choice of evil—sins of pride, and cruelty, and lust, which had, as it were, run up a terrible account against him. Now, in the time of his danger and distress, he thinks of them all, and lays them at the feet of God. 'For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great.'

2. But we see also, and quite clearly, that the text contains a special warning to the young. For there are sins of youth, sins and faults to which, when young, we are particularly prone.

(1) *Preoccupation with our own interests and pleasures* gives rise to many of our youthful sins. At the half-way house in our development we have scarcely escaped the infantile illusion which presumes that the entire system of Nature should be at the service of our little ego. The sheaves of our fathers and brethren must bow down before our sheaves, and there is more vanity than inspiration in the dream as we dream it. The interest of contemporary history is to centre in our personal biography. Kindness has tended for the time to spoil us and to puff us up. This ungracious temper is often pronounced in proportion to the love that has been lavished upon us. It is not an easy thing for one who through long years has been accepting the fondness and unstinted service of the home to put himself into a new position and realize that he in turn must be a minister of the gifts received from others.

¶ In the early years of life the soul-attitude named 'selfishness' may be said to be natural. The young soul is dominated by desires—extravagant desires to enjoy and possess. The necessities of social life, excepting in rare obstinate cases, soon modify this extreme selfishness. Many of these desires are in opposition to laws and customs, and to the desires and good of others; and the consequent conflict of interests necessarily engenders a regard for the things which cause it. The individual soon discovers that, merely to avoid trouble, he must respect the feelings and rights of others, and check and modify his desires at least to this extent.[1]

(2) *Pride in the exercise of newly-acquired power* gives rise to many of the half-defined sins of youth. The change from a state of subjection to a state in which we have liberty to judge for ourselves forms a grave crisis in the individual history, and not infrequently tempts to a wanton and hurtful assertion of independence. We go about assuring ourselves, and politely reminding our past counsellors, that we have become masters of our own movement, and that we intend to lay the ship upon its course without any outside advice. This temptation is peculiarly strong when a mere child comes into the early possession of money, or earns a high wage which makes a separate home possible before full manhood is reached. In his progress towards maturity, and his release from early restraints, a youth passes through the same peril as a newly-enfranchised race.

¶ A boy with a knife is very liable to carve his name in the polished walnut of the piano or to cut notches out of the neatly-turned legs of the dining-room table. From all parts of the world people go on pilgrimage to Westminster Abbey. And, at the Abbey, they are shown the Coronation Chair. Seated in it, all our English sovereigns have been crowned, and it is encrusted with traditions that go back to the days of the patriarchs. But a boy with a knife feels no reverence for antiquity. On the night of July 5th, 1800, a Westminster schoolboy got locked in the Abbey. He curled himself up in the Coronation Chair, and made it his resting-place until morning. And, in the morning, he thought of his pocket-knife. And, as the dawn came streaming through the storied eastern windows, he carved deeply into the solid oak of the seat of the chair, the notable inscription:

[1] R. H. Hodgson, *Glad Tidings!* 21.

P. Abbot slept in this chair, July 5, 1800. Thus he buried his blade in one of the noblest of our great historic treasures. It was enough to make the illustrious dead, by whom he was everywhere surrounded, turn in their ancient graves. George the Fourth and all his successors have since been crowned in a Chair that bears that impertinent record! Yet, as the chips flew, the boy felt no compunction. And, in his stolid calm, he is the type and representative of all who abuse the authority with which they are invested. He feels, as he wields the knife, that all things are at his mercy; he can shape them to his liking. He forgets that power carries its attendant obligations, and that, foremost among those obligations, is the obligation to restraint.[1]

(3) *A sense of infallibility* is another characteristic infirmity of youth. We do not a little mischief at our first introduction into the larger world by overgauging the worth and the certainty of our own knowledge. And that is a peculiar temptation of the present hour. For many centuries science and learning were practically at a standstill, and children could not possibly know more than their elders. That condition of things is past, for we live in an age of wonderful developments, and the man who is abreast of his times in one quarter of a century is a stick-in-the-mud when the next quarter begins. The new secrets man is learning become the special heritage of the rising rather than of the departing generation, and it would be a miracle if the rising generation did not assume a superior tone. We learn some things the older people did not know, and are in danger of assuming they knew nothing at all. Perhaps we quote at a discount the manifold and painfully-garnered experiences of the past. It is well to check this blind, vain temper of priggish infallibility to which we are so prone, by remembering that no new discovery has been made in the highest of all branches of science—that which regulates conduct—for two thousand years.

(4) *Unhappy and resentful moods of soul* stay with us longer in youth than in the days of childhood, and eat more deeply into the sensibilities. It is not easy to keep from anger, pride, intolerance. Our hot blood inclines us to say, 'We do well to be angry.' These quick, ill-regulated moods beget the belief that force is an effectual and rapid remedy for every kind of evil. We want the shortest cut to the goal upon which we have fixed our eye, forgetful of the fact that human nature never bows, unless for a moment, to any other influence than that of moral suasion. It will take a life-time to convince some people who are not adepts in the art of clear reasoning, and they must be made to submit. But human nature has not that particular kind of crook in its neck which is taught by the iron discipline of those religious establishments which make the suppression of the will the soul of all religion. Every young man who wants to reach great public ameliorations by a short and quick pathway tends to become intolerant, if not a persecutor. Moses, Jonah, Saul of Tarsus, before the impetuosity of their manhood had been worn down, believed in compulsory methods, and so deferred, even when they did not destroy, their own enterprises.

¶ Writing to his son in India, who had waxed hot over a case of official corruption, Sir Henry Jones advises: There is one mark I should like to underline. It is that to keep in one's mind a matter like this, a matter that brings the feeling of hatred and anger, is like keeping a bit of stinking meat in one's larder —it is unhealthy and poisonous. So *out* with it, machgen i, for we can shut things out, and strong men do it. It is a condition of a healthy soul and of good work, and the mischief *will* pass, provided you do not let the matter hurt your mind and it has not hurt you physically. . . .[1]

(5) Youthful character is brought into peril by *animal passions.* Through the first stages of the unfolding life these peculiar forces of temptation lurk in noiseless ambush, and all at once rise into tumult, vehemence, raging tyranny. In every breast sleeps a volcano, a standing menace to the gardens and vineyards within reach of its stealthy fires. And

[1] F. W. Boreham, *Rubble and Roseleaves,* 215.

[1] *The Life and Letters of Sir Henry Jones,* 238.

the peril is the keener because the upgrowth of these fleshly impulses coincides with a period of ardent imagination. It is true there are the great purifying enthusiasms of youth to counterbalance the peril, but the danger is there, and it sometimes becomes transgression. The romance and the dare-devil courage of incipient manhood sweep into a jeopardizing proximity to vice, even when they do not plunge the soul into its vortex. The infirmities and besetments already enumerated—the tendency to make pleasure a rule of conduct, that depreciation of natural authority and its precepts which just stops short of rebellion, the vaunting self-efficiency bred by pride of knowledge, the lack of self-restraint in the minor issues of life corrode and wear thin the protecting armour of the spirit, and prepare for the collapse in which the high promise of youth is wrecked.

¶ The taming of hot nature—that is the ordeal. Does each young man see that this is his first task in life? Do not argue that God has charged you with these animal appetites, and why, if He has planted them, are they not to be indulged? God has given you something else at the same time—a will and a moral instinct by which you are able to restrain these impulses. Have you not a will? That is, or may be made, a force as strong as the might of natural desire. You have fine intuitions which tell you you are cheating yourself when you plead animal cravings as an excuse for self-indulgence. God has endowed you with powers by which to tame and conquer these baser energies, and turn them to the service of a man's true work.

These hot energies, which are his peril, will help to make the man, if the manhood in him has mastery over the beast. They not only feed the proper ambitions which incite men to greatness, but they are even a good 'basement' on which the strongest and saintliest characters may be reared.

Luther was all the greater as God's 'hammer' because of the vehement animal element in his blood. Santa Teresa burned with intense natural feelings, which, when mastered, turned to power and made her the more intense and conquering as a saint.[1]

A Prayer for Pardon.

Ps. xxv. 11.—'For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great.'

Nothing is known as to the circumstances under which the Twenty-fifth Psalm was written, only, from the allusion to the sins and offences of his youth, the presumption is that the writer was no longer young when it was composed. And, therefore, we have this lesson—which it behoves us to lay to heart—that his penitence and sorrow for sin were not things which, being once expressed, were thought of no more, but rather they were ever before him, for years after his sins were committed.

So must it be with those whose early years are stained with the defilements of sin. Either they will go on as they have begun, adding sin to sin, till they live and die in open rebellion against God; or, if they see the error of their ways, and find that they have laid up in store for themselves a life of sorrow and anxiety, they must be content to pass the remainder of their days as penitents.

There are three things in the text—

1. *A cry for pardon.*—Most of us, when we pray at all, put in somewhere or other the petition, 'Forgive us our sins.' How many of us understand what we mean when we ask for that? And how many of us feel that we need the thing which we seem to be requesting? Now there are two elements in forgiveness as we know it, both of which it is very important that we should carry in our minds in interpreting the Scriptural doctrine. There is the forgiveness known to law and practised by the lawgiver. There is the forgiveness known to love and practised by the friend, or parent, or lover. The one consists in the remission of external penalties. A criminal is forgiven, or, as we say (with an unconscious restriction of the word *forgiven* to the deeper

[1] R. E. Welsh, *Man to Man*, 54.

thing), *pardoned,* when, the remainder of his sentence being remitted, he is let out of gaol, and allowed to go about his business without any legal penalties. But there is a forgiveness deeper than that legal pardon. A parent and a child both know that parental pardon does not consist in the waiving of punishment. The averted look, the cold voice, the absence of signs of love are far harder to bear than so-called punishment. And the forgiveness which belongs to love comes only when the film between the two is swept away, and both the offended and the offender feel that there is no barrier to the free, unchecked flow of love from the heart of the aggrieved to the heart of the aggressor. We must carry both of these ideas into our thoughts of God's pardon in order to see the whole fullness of it.

2. *A plea for pardon.*—'For thy name's sake.' The Psalmist does not come with any carefully elaborated plea grounded upon anything in himself, either on the excuses for and palliations of his evil, his corrupt nature, his many temptations, and the like, or on the depth and reality of his repentance. He does not say, 'Forgive me, for I weep for my evil and loathe myself.' Nor does he say, 'Forgive me, for I could not help doing it; or because I was tempted; or because the thing that I have done is a very little thing after all.' He comes empty-handed, and says, 'For thy name's sake, O Lord!'

(1) That means, first, the great thought that God's mercy flows from the infinite depths of His own character. He is His own motive. The fountain of His forgiving love wells up of itself, drawn forth by nothing that we do, but propelled from within by the inmost nature of God. As surely as it is the property of light to radiate and of fire to spread, so surely is it His nature and property to have mercy. He forgives, says our text, because He is God, and cannot but do so. Therefore our mightiest plea is to lay hold of His own strength, and to grasp the fact of the unmotived, uncompelled, unpurchased, and therefore unalterable and eternal, pardoning love of God.

(2) Then there is another thought here—that the past of God is a plea with God for present forgiveness. 'Thy name' in Scripture means the whole revelation of the Divine character, and thus the Psalmist looks back into the past, and sees there how God has, all through the ages, been plenteous in mercy and ready to forgive all who called upon Him; and he pleads that past as a reason for the present and for the future. Thousands of years have passed since David, if he was the Psalmist, offered this prayer; and we can look back to the blessed old story of *his* forgiveness, so swift, so absolute and free, which followed upon confession so lowly, and can remember that infinitely pathetic and wonderful word which puts the whole history of the resurrection and restoration of a soul into two clauses. 'David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David'—finishing the sentence—'The Lord also hath put away thy sin.' What He was He is; what He is He will be. 'For thy name's sake, pardon mine iniquity.'

He knocketh, saith, 'Open, belovèd,
I pray thee to let Me come in.
Behold I have borne all the judgment,
Thy sins, O belovèd, are gone;
Forgotten, forgotten for ever,
God seeketh, but findeth not one.

Behold with what labour I won thee,
Behold in My hands and My feet,
The tale of My measureless sorrow—
Of love that made sorrow so sweet.
A flax-thread in oceans of fire,
How soon swallowed up would it be!
Yet sooner in oceans of mercy,
The sinner that cometh to Me.'[1]

3. *A reason for pardon.*—'For it is great.' That may be a reason for the pardon or it may be a reason for the prayer. The fact is true in regard to us all. If the fact be so, then is not that a reason for our all going to the only One who can dredge it away, and get rid of it? 'Pardon me; for it is great.'

[1] *Sunday Afternoon Verses* (ed. W. R. Nicoll), 123.

That is to say, 'There is no one else who can deal with it but Thyself, O Lord! It is too large for me to cart away; it is too great for any inferior hand to deal with. I am *so* bad that I can come only to Thyself to be made better.' It is blessed and wise when the consciousness of our deep transgression drives us to the only Hand that can heal, to the only Heart that can forgive.[1]

¶ Pardon my sin, for it is great. Can you believe it true? Urge this plea at the Old Bailey and see if it will be accepted. 'Let me off because my crime is great!' Ah no! In no Court of Law could it be accepted, but in the Court of Love.'[2]

The Confidants of God.

Ps. xxv. 14.—'The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him.'

This English word 'secret' is one of many renderings of a remarkable word in the Hebrew Scripture which describes the inner, intimate counsel of any fellowship, as opposed to their public policy and action, which is seen and known of all men. Such a word is interesting, because it describes something of the importance of which we are fully conscious. We live through stirring days. We witness nations, classes, parties, Churches, engaged in public action on the great stage of the world or some department of it. But we are constantly forced to feel that there is something behind their public policy. We feel that we should have liked to be at such and such a Cabinet meeting, or a conference of Labour leaders. As we say, we should like to know what they are 'really at.' This is what this Hebrew word describes. It may be a conspiracy of evil men, as in the verse, 'Hide me from the gathering together [or conspiracy] of the froward'; or it may be the secret counsel of the righteous, 'when they that fear the Lord speak often one to another' and 'take sweet counsel together.' Again, in the most august sphere we look out in the pages of the Bible upon a wild and disorderly world where yet we are to believe that God rules, and we would know His secret counsel. So Job bids us think of God's 'council of his holy ones' in heaven where they learn His secret. And Amos bids us understand the real meaning of a prophet as one admitted to understand God's secret counsel. 'Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.' And in the text the Psalmist extends the idea to all the really faithful. 'The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him.'

'The secret counsel of the Lord is with them that fear him.' Is this not an idea which attracts—the idea of the good man, without any special qualities or faculties but the goodness which makes him attend constantly upon God, kept hopeful and patient and persevering because by faithful attention to the Divine word and faithful correspondence with the Divine Spirit he has been allowed to conceive in his mind a clear idea of the Divine purpose in the world and in the Church, and in his own part of the Church? It is no completeness of knowledge to which he has attained, for 'we know in part' only and see many things but as a blurred reflection in a metal mirror; but it is a sufficiently clear idea of the Divine purpose to make faith steady and hope sure and love active.

1. Suppose a man with whatever equipment of knowledge and critical faculty he can acquire, but any way with a real concentration of his spiritual attention, to have studied the Figure in the Gospels. Suppose him to have come to the conclusion that you cannot reduce that Figure to merely human dimensions, and, indeed, that no other interpretation of His Person than that of St. Paul and St. John is at all adequate. Suppose him to feel that the sequence of ideas which he finds in the New Testament, as a whole, about God and man and sin and redemption; about atonement and sanctification through the Spirit; about the Church and the Sacraments—cohere inseparably with the doctrine of Christ's Person and with one another. Suppose him to feel that

[1] A. Maclaren.
[2] Father Stanton.

the Person of Christ, believed to be the Incarnate Son of God, and thus to represent a quite new relation of the Creator to the material world, makes what we call miracles natural in His case, both the miracle of His Birth and Resurrection from the dead, and the miracles wrought by His hands; and that the evidence is cogent and in some parts overwhelming. Such a man will stand upon the basis of the Catholic Creed. He will have received it from outside, but by putting it to account in his own life he will have gained inward spiritual conviction. He will have the witness in himself. Such a man will thank God indeed for the gift of faith, and will feel a humble confidence that he has been admitted to the counsel of God. Thus he will not be dismayed to find how often the Church has been unfaithful and has made the Word of God of none effect by its traditions. He will always go back to the fountain-head of the Apostolic witness and understand afresh the purpose of God. He will not be astonished by ages of unbelief. He has taken in the meaning of our Lord's tremendous question, anticipating an extreme strain on faith, 'When the Son of man cometh shall he find faith on the earth?' But he will recognize that there is nothing so enduring as the Church because of the foundation on which it rests. It is the counsel of God for humanity. And, after all sorts of experiments in belief have been tried and all sorts of combinations of true and false suggested, he will expect to see the men of goodwill coming back to the old home. 'The Lord hath chosen Zion, and in her shall the afflicted of his people take refuge.' And he will occupy himself according to his powers in making that ancient home acceptable to the best spirits, when they shall be ready for it, by purging it from superstition or fanaticisms that it may wear again the aspect that it wore under the teaching of its first interpreters.

2. Suppose a man who has some knowledge of European history since the days of the Franciscan movement, which stirred again the Christian feeling of the equal spiritual worth in God's sight of every soul, to come to the conviction that the slowly rising tide of democracy represents, in the natural political order, a real movement of God, as St. Paul saw God's purpose in the Roman Empire. Suppose such a one to see that the experiment of democracy has really to be tried—government of the people, for the people, by the people—in the industrial no less than the political sphere. He will see that the age is passed or passing when the mass of men, 'the workers,' were content to recognize another class as their betters and to be governed by them and in their interest. He will see that nothing less is asked for than a fundamental reconstruction of our industrial, even more than of our political, system. There, too, control must be in the hands of the whole body of the workers, workers both by hand and brain in due proportion. And the payment of a really 'living wage' for every worker must be truly the first charge upon the industry. The man who has come to such a conclusion will not feel it blasphemy to call this the Will of God. He will feel that this is the road along which God is calling us—His counsel. He will know that democracy, like monarchy or autocracy, is a dangerous experiment; but it is an experiment that has to be tried. He will not be dismayed by the crudities, violences, and ignorances of the manual workers or their leaders. He is used to find such things in all movements. He will not be so much interested to allot to one side or the other in any particular industrial disturbance its share of blame. He will concentrate all his efforts as a citizen in helping the country to face the fundamental reconstruction of our industrial system required of us; and all his efforts as a Christian to disencumber the Christian Faith of its association with anachronisms and injustices, that the people may be able to see what the Faith really means, and find out before it is too late that there is none other name in which they can find their social salvation than the Name of Jesus. This sort of perception of the Divine purpose for the present time, and this sort of co-operation with it, is possible to any one who in some real sense believes in God.[1]

[1] C. Gore.

Outlook.

Ps. xxv. 15.—'Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord; for he shall pluck my feet out of the net.'

In any man's life a great deal depends upon outlook. In some ways we recognize this fact. We do not by choice live in a house whose windows front a blank wall. No; a little patch of green grass, a tree, a peep of sky, or even the traffic of a busy street—anything rather than a blank wall. That is a sound instinct, but it ought to go deeper than it sometimes does. The outlook and aspect question is important when you are building a house, but it is vastly more important when you are building a character. The soul has eyes. The deadliest monotony is that of a dull soul. Life is a poor affair for any man who looks out upon the blind walls of earthly circumstance and necessity, and cannot see from his soul's dwelling-place the pink flush of the dawn that men call hope; who has no garden where he may grow the blossoms of faith and sweet memory, the fair flowers of human trusts and fellowships. Only the divinity of life can deliver us from the monotony of living.

'Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord.' That man had an infinite outlook. It matters not whether he looked out through palace windows or lived in the meanest house in Jerusalem's city. It is the eye that makes the view. This man had a fairer prospect than ever man had who looked seaward from Carmel or across the valleys from the steeps of Libanus. It was his soul that claimed the prospect. From the window of the little house of life he saw the light of God on the everlasting hills. That is the real deliverance from the monotony of things. The man who is weary of life is the man who has not seen it. The man who is tied to his desk sometimes thinks everything would be right if only he could travel. But many a man has done the Grand Tour and come back no better contented. You cannot fool your soul with Mont Blanc or even the Himalayas. So many thousand feet, did you say?—but what is that to infinity! The cure for the fretful soul is not to go *round* the world; it is to get *beyond* it.

¶ Mr. Hind I think it is who tells us of meeting Francis Thompson one desolate winter day in Chancery Lane. Thompson was ill clad, wearing 'a disastrous hat,' carrying a kind of carpet-bag containing books. It was a day of melting snow and unusual discomfort. But as the poet passed by, recognising nothing, and unaware of the nearness of his friend, Hind saw his face lifted up to the sun, which had suddenly found an opening; and the face was shining as in an ecstasy, and tears were in his eyes! And this same Thompson, we know, once upon a time saw a ladder let down from Heaven to Charing Cross![1]

'Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord.' That is the far-sighted man. He can see an ever larger life opening out before him. He can see the glory of the eternal righteousness in his daily duties and the wonder of eternal love in the daily fellowships and fulfilments of the brotherhood. This is measuring life by the heavenly measurement. This is the vision we need day by day and at the end of the days. For interest in some things must wane, and life must become less responsive to all that lies about it. Many an earthly link is broken and many an earthly window is darkened, and the old faces and old ways pass, and the thing the old man cherishes is trodden under foot by the impetuous tread of a new generation, and desire fails. Then it is well with him whose eyes have already caught glimpses of 'the King in His beauty,' and 'the land that is very far off.'

¶ Take the question of later age, the time when youth and passion are gone. There are men who find what remains a mere vacuity, a dreary realm of prose. James Mill found it so. Benjamin Constant puts it explicitly: 'When the age of passion is over, what else can you desire except to escape from life with the least possible pain?' The Frenchman is repeating here, almost in the same language, what Anacreon had said long ages before. One wonders what a man like Wesley would

[1] J. A. Hutton.

have said to talk of this kind; or Channing, who found in old age life growing ever fuller, ever happier! Walter Pater, in 'Marius the Epicurean,' suggests the true order here, where in Cornelius Fronto he pictures an old man who constantly makes up for the decay of the physical 'by an added grace of culture.' Only, one needs more than culture, in the common sense of that term. For it is precisely when the heats of youth are over that the soul finds the opening for its own greater activities. Life's business there is like gold mining in the Klondike. At the beginning the ore is found on the surface; it is there almost for the picking up; later that easy process serves no longer. The treasure lies deeper down. It is buried out of sight, and only those who are prepared with mining apparatus, who can bore and drill into the depths, can hope to find it. But there is more there, underneath, than ever lay on the surface. The men of mid age or old age who exclaim against the poverty of life are simply exhibiting the poverty of their own souls. They are on the top of a gold reef, but too lazy to develop in themselves the means of reaching it.[1]

But think for a moment of the present value of the Divine outlook upon life. It brings guidance and deliverance. Set side by side the two expressions 'eyes upon the Lord,' and 'feet out of the net.' Life is more than a vision; it is a pilgrimage. We see the far white peaks whereon rests the glory of life, but reaching them is not a matter of eyes, but of feet. Here, perhaps, the real problem of godly living presents itself to us. Here our Christian idealism lays a burden on us. It is possible to see distances that would take days to traverse. Even so we can see heights of spiritual possibility that we shall not reach while the light holds good, unless we foot it bravely.

And it is not an easy journey. There are so many snares set for the pilgrims of faith and hope. There are subtle silken nets woven of soft-spun deceits and filmy threads of sin; and there are coarse strong nets fashioned by the strong hands of passion and evil desire. There are nets of doubt and pain and weakness. But think of the man whose eyes were ever towards the Lord. He came through all right. He always does. He always will. He looked steadily upward to his God. When we get into the net we yield to the natural tendency to look down at our feet. We try to discover how the net is made. We delude ourselves with the idea that if only we take time we shall be able to extricate ourselves; but it always means getting further entangled. It is a waste of time to study the net. Life is ever weaving for us snares too intricate for us to unravel and too strong for us to break. God alone understands how they are made and how they may be broken. He does not take us round the net or over it, but He does not leave us fast by the feet in the midst of it. He always brings a man out on the heavenward side of the earthly difficulty. Let us look upward and we are bound to go forward.

[1] J. Brierley, *Faith's Certainties*, 218.

His Covenant.

Ps. xxv. 14.—'He will shew them his covenant.'

THE word 'covenant' is Israel's gospel. It was the rainbow on the heavens of their life. It was the rock on which their commonwealth was built. It was the food of grace by which noble souls were nourished into greatness and strength. It was the inspiration of legislators and judges like Moses and Gideon, and of seers like Elijah and Hosea. It told them that they were the elect people; that the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob was their God; that He had bound Himself, as a master to a servant, as a husband to a wife, to take care of them, to watch over them in their wanderings, to guide them through their difficulties, to be their shepherd, their physician, their redeeming Lord. It was this 'covenant' that fed their patience, heartened them after every defeat, and gave them new hope in their despair. It was the working idea of Hebrew life. What the Magna Charta is in the political history and development of England, that, and infinitely more, was the Covenant in the life of the people of God.

Therefore, to find out its meaning was their meat and drink, to know what it signified was their strength and joy; so that no promise had a wider compass or a sweeter music than the gladdening strain, 'He will shew them his covenant.' It was what the words 'God is love' are to us. It told them that God would unveil to them the terms under which He entered into special relations with them as His people, the laws according to which He governed them, the conditions they had to keep on their part and the pledges he would honour on His. They would know that to be 'the Covenant People' meant that God had, indeed, chosen them to be His own for ever. More exhilarating message they could not hear than the words, 'He will shew them his covenant.'

But, whilst it is a great historic word, it contains as its base an eternal and universal fact. God's revelation of Himself to Israel is an exposition of the truths which underlie the whole of our human life. What He did with and for that people is a prolonged instruction as to what He is doing for all men, by what processes He enters into definite relations with us, under what terms we dwell with Him in uplifting fellowship, and by what paths He conducts us to the surest happiness, so that the promise is to us and to our children. He will shew us his covenant. He will reveal to us by His Spirit the things of nature and grace.

Indeed, it is an indisputable fact that He has done so. He has shown us His covenant. We are as sure of His love and care of us as we are of the law of gravitation; we feel that we are not 'cunning casts of clay,' but partakers of the Divine nature; not 'magnetic mockeries,' but spiritual realities; and that His personal love of us is the one solace of the heart, the one supreme joy of life. It is this that lights up the dark and cloudy day, brings solace in sorrow and victory over despair. It is this that marks out the path of duty, creating an invincible conviction that a specific work has to be done, or hazard to be made, or burden to be borne. Men see the 'secret' of their own life and hear His call to service as distinctly as Peter and John heard the call of Christ, and they respond with the same wholehearted promptitude and consecration.

Nay, more, they have discovered that the invincible God controls all the happenings of life, and compels them to co-operate for their good, and that therefore nothing can hurt them. 'No weapon formed against them can prosper.' Thus they have entered into peace, and have said, 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul? All is well. Why fret about the morrow? Live well and nobly to-day. God is the God of the future. Trust in Him and fear not. Life is lovingly ordered. God is in it and over it. Fret not; fretting is waste. Worry not; worry is dissipation of the limited stock of energy. In Him is peace. They that trust in the Lord are as Mount Zion, that cannot be removed for ever.' The revealed secret of the gracious rule of God is their everlasting peace.

Who knows? God knows: and what He knows
  Is well and best.
The darkness hideth not from Him, but glows
Clear as the morning or the evening rose
  Of east or west.

Wherefore man's strength is to sit still:
  Not wasting care
To antedate to-morrow's good or ill;
Yet watching meekly, watching with good will,
  Watching to prayer.

Some rising or some setting ray
  From east or west,
If not to-day, why then another day
Will light each dove upon the homeward way
  Safe to her nest.[1]

But how do we enter into this 'secret' of the revelation of God? Not by the exercise of our lower faculties; for though God stands over against all our faculties, lower and higher, yet it is not by the senses that we come upon His choicest revelations. The eye sees the daisies decking the field with beauty, the brilliant red of the rose, the variegated colours of the spring blossoms, the splendour and pomp of the midnight sky, and the innumer-

[1] Christina G. Rossetti.

able wonders of Nature; but that is all. The deep things of Nature, as Lord Bacon taught, are unveiled only to the mind that is sympathetic with and reverent and obedient to Nature. Obedience is the organ of knowledge everywhere. If a man wills to do the will of the Father, he carries with him the test of the teaching, whether it is of God or no. And love of God and of man is the inspiration to obedience. The veil is always drawn aside to the loving and obedient soul. 'If a man love me, he will keep my words,' said Jesus; 'and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him'; and in that domestic atmosphere the clouds of error and doubt will disappear, and the light of life and of eternity will fill the dwelling.

For revelation is seen at its fullness in Jesus Christ. He is the unveiling of life. He lays its deepest secrets bare. He tells all we are able to hear now; and His Spirit waits to tell more as our power to receive grows. He is the Interpreter of the covenant of God with the whole race of man. In Him we see the redeeming purpose that penetrates and sways the life of the individual, of the human race, and of the whole creation of God. It is He who discloses the mystery hidden from the foundation of the world. We have the Divine purpose written out in a life. The whole course of Providence is set out in a single career. Jesus is the philosophy of history, the gospel of revelation in its completeness. Let us enter, then, into the school of Christ, and He will, by the teaching of His Spirit, take the veil from our eyes, and enable us by the Spirit to see life as it really is, and to use all its contents for our comfort and growth, and for the service of God and man.[1]

¶ It is the glory of God to be the faithful Father, striving to save to the uttermost. This is the God whom Christ has made real to the world. He shows us God doing what it is natural for His fidelity to do—God recognizing the burden of His Fatherhood towards every human creature—God bearing all things and enduring all things for the sake of those whom He can never give up, because they are His own. If faithfulness is the deepest virtue in man, then we can rely on the utter faithfulness of Him who, having loved His own, loves them unto the end.

This is what the Puritans meant when they spoke of a covenant-keeping God.

Such a covenant implies fixity and security. It is ordered in all things and sure. It lies deeper than our fluctuations of feeling and moods of emotion, it endures through the chances and changes of outward affairs. God has bound us to Himself by links which are settled and stablished beyond our altering. Though we be faithless, He abideth faithful.[1]

[1] J. Clifford.

Examination.

Ps. xxvi. 2.—'Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart.'

The word 'examine' here is a very forcible word. It means to examine by fire, by that which shall burn up all the dross, and leave behind only what can pass through fire. Again, the word 'try' is further expressive. The Hebrew word means to melt by fire; in other words, to examine by fire to the point of melting. Thus the examination the Psalmist asked for was an examination by fire—an examination that should burn away everything that was impure. He did not want to be spared. He was anxious that God should take his examination into His own hands, and conduct it in His own way, and submit him to such tests as would find out all his weakness, all his errors, and all his sins.

¶ Somewhere in London there is a museum of broken materials used in engineering work. This organised testing laboratory is to examine materials which have failed, and by practical tests to show why they failed. The museum contains hundreds of broken pieces of steel, iron, brass, wood, stone, and cement, and the reason for their failure is revealed. The Psalmist daringly, trustingly, brings his

[1] T. H. Darlow, *At Home in the Bible*, 256.

reason and heart into the laboratory of God, and demands that any secret flaw therein shall be detected and exposed.[1]

But God's examination is to be conducted by ourselves. We examine ourselves in the presence of God. Here is the true and proper method of examination; it must be accomplished under and through the scrutiny or inspecting power of God; we truly prove ourselves, when He proves us, and may rightly approve ourselves, only when He approves us.

1. Let us examine *our secret life.* Each of us lives a life which only God knows and sees. It is a life of thoughts which never find expression; of ambitions which are never realized; of resolutions which are never carried out. It is a life of whose existence our dearest ones may never have dreamed, a life that we live alone. Yet how much sin there is in it! When the light of God falls into those secret chambers of ours, no wonder we start as if we were stricken. For see what it reveals.

(1) *Evil thoughts.*—Evil thoughts about God; murmurings at His dealings; rebellion against His will; complainings against the place in which He has put us. Thoughts sometimes so dark that if expressed they would find fit expression in words of blasphemy. Thoughts never uttered to others; but whispered only in the silence of the soul. Evil thoughts about men—angry, envious, spiteful, malicious—thoughts whose full expression in words would be cursing, and in deed murder. That they do not find such expression is due only to the grace of God within us.

(2) *Evil imaginations and desires.*—They are found in our hearts. Imaginings are there, impure and unholy, sometimes, alas, cherished and gloated over; imaginings that appear with terrible vividness in our dreams. And these imaginings are followed quickly by strong and passionate desire that might find its outcome in acts foul and unclean were it not for the restraining influence of God's Spirit. These are two forms in which the leaven of sin appears in the secret chambers of our life. But our Lord, in His description of the heart, tells of others. Let us read it, praying that, as we read it, we may be broken down before God, and all our pride and wretched self-conceit removed. 'From within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness' (Mark vii. 21-28). What an awful discovery God's holiness makes when it shines on us! There is leaven, there is sin in our secret life, and it has hindered us in our pursuit of holiness.

If God should draw life's veiling flood away
What sights the human beach could show the day!
What doubts, what creeping aims, what dreams long drowned,
What hopes, like fallen stars, would there be found!
What wreckage where the surface calmly sleeps;
What shallows where we most had looked for deeps!
Strange rocks of cruelty that lie concealed,
Clad in pale weeds of vice, might rise revealed
Where monster habits in their slimy pride
Through falsehood's clinging brine securely glide.
God pity all!—oh, may His own grace hide
And save our secret souls from such ebb tide![1]

2. Let us examine *our home life.* Christianity is pre-eminently a religion for the home. In our home life we may find, many will find, the secret of past failure in holiness. Sins have been tolerated in the home of which we should have been ashamed outside. In our home life is found the leaven which has hindered the Lord from blessing us. It may be in the form of temper, that terrible disturber of domestic peace. How much damage this one form of sin has done! What misery it has caused! Quarrels between husband and wife, hot and angry words flung to and

[1] W. L. Watkinson, *The Gates of Dawn*, 1.

[1] Martha G. Dickinson.

fro, accusations and recriminations from those who, before God, vowed to love one another. Quarrels between mistress and servant; nagging, carping, and scolding, leading to irritation and bitterness on the one side, and stubborn sullenness on the other. Quarrels between brothers and sisters, embittering family life and destroying the peace of the home. Or it may be in the form of selfishness and thoughtlessness, things that cause an amount of pain which those who inflict it never intended. Have we been hot-tempered, thoughtless, and selfish in our homes? Then no wonder our Christian experience has been unsatisfactory. If these things have been wrong in our life, let us seek grace to put them right. For though they may seem small, they are of vital importance. Even if they are little matters, they are flies in the ointment, that destroy its savour, morsels of leaven in the house, that defile it and keep the Saviour away.

¶ There went the round of the papers, some years ago, a story, which was supposed to be humorous, but which was really very far from amusing to any thoughtful Christian man. According to the story, a certain man came home and found to his indignation, that a tramp had called in his absence, and had been very harsh and insulting to his wife. The man was very much incensed, and at length, turning angrily upon his son, a youth of twelve or fourteen years of age, asked sharply, 'Where were you, Harry, when this occurred?' 'I was in the woodshed,' answered the boy with some confusion. 'Couldn't you hear the man talking to your mother?' demanded the father more severely now. 'Yes,' replied the lad shamefacedly. 'Then why didn't you interfere?' thundered the irate father, ready to vent his vexation upon the child. But the boy made answer, still hanging his head, and without any impertinence in his manner, 'Because, father, I-I-I thought it was you.'

It is hardly too much to allow that this might have happened in many a professedly Christian home. There are Christian men, at least men of Christian profession not a few, who habitually talk to their wives and children in a manner which they would not for a moment tolerate from an outsider. They snarl and scold and browbeat in a way in which no gentleman would address a stranger of either sex. And in this respect it is only fair to say women are sometimes almost, if not quite, as bad. They nag and whine and fret and fume in the home, and are all smiles and graciousness outside. So also, in many a Christian home, brothers and sisters indulge in language toward each other which they would not stand from anybody else. Many a Christian boy, if overheard by his girl friends talking to his sister or mother after the manner in which he frequently 'talks back' at them, would hardly lift his face before his friends again. And the sisters are not by any means faultless with respect to their manners toward their intimates in the home.[1]

3. If we have dealt with God faithfully about our home ways, let us ask Him now to deal with us about *our social ways*. In the practices of society there is much that hinders holiness, and possibly in the way in which we have acted when in company with our friends may be found the secret of our failure as Christians. The world is almost as hostile to Christ to-day as it was when the Bible was written. It is still true that the friendship of the world is enmity with God. And society as a whole is thoroughly worldly; the spirit of the world reigns in it. So our social ways, which are determined very much by the general practice, are apt to be such as are displeasing to Christ. Christ teaches men to despise wealth; society teaches them to worship it. Christ says, 'Putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour'; society commands us to hide our feelings under expressions that are sometimes absolutely false. Christ bids us put away all evil-speaking; society bids us make it almost the staple of conversation. How the insincerity and hollowness of our social life must grieve the Lord Jesus! What can He think of our

[1] R. Whitaker, *The Gospel at Work in Modern Life*, 53.

pretended love for those whom in our hearts we hate? of our professed admiration of those whose gifts we envy? of the respect paid to people whom at heart we despise? The masking and shamming and petty deceit of much of our social life must pain Him beyond measure. Let us ask Him to reveal to us our sin, and in this very difficult sphere of life to lead us in His own way.

4. Let us search and try *our business ways.* Some may shrink from this, and say in their heart what some have said openly, that a man's religion ought not to be allowed to interfere with his business. But if a man's religion is not allowed to come into his business, it is of a kind that is scarce worth having. In the business ways of many professing Christians is to be found the secret of their failure and defeat. Some may have completely to change their business life ere they can be holy. The hindrances of holiness in our business life may be of various kinds. It may be the character of the business itself. The business may be a God-dishonouring, soul-destroying one, and the moment that is realized by the believer, the business must be given up at all costs. It may be avarice. The business may be right, but the money it is bringing in may be occupying a wrong place in our heart. It may be debt. This is a far more common hindrance to holiness than many are aware of. Thousands of professing Christians have found in the prompt payment of debts a door leading to a life of new blessing. It may be thoughtlessness for the comfort of employees, causing pain and misery never intended, and bringing reproach on the name of Christ. What the sins of our business life are God will reveal to us if we humbly ask Him.

¶ What is a nobler sight to look upon than a Christian merchant standing at the head of his operations; thriving in the small, or rolling up his immense income in the large; doing everything squarely, as in terms of business, and not in a fast and loose manner, yet with a Christian heart as flexible and free, and as little hampered by the mechanism of trade as love itself must ever be; then passing out among his kind, to look about for objects wanting his aid; standing as a bank of charity for all good necessities to draw upon; resorted to with confidence by all who are forward in good works; spreading his generosity well up toward the limit of his surplus means; firm in credit; honoured for his word of promise; sought unto in trust by the righteous, and remembered in the prayers of the poor—is there on this earth a character more to be envied, or more genuinely Christ-like, than he?[1]

The Beauty of God's House.

Ps. xxvi. 8.—'Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house.'

THE Book of Psalms is a relic of the faith and worship of ancient Israel. Not one of those matchless hymns and songs of the Spirit can be assigned to a Christian origin. The entire collection belongs to Judaism and the Jewish Church. We, indeed, are so accustomed to the regular use of the Psalter in the Services of our own Church, we are so familiar from childhood onward with the use of it for purposes of private devotion, we are so habituated to regarding it as a common storehouse of holy thought and heavenward aspiration, of Divine teaching and human responsiveness, a universal text-book of prayer and praise, of meditation, confession, and thanksgiving, a manual of religious worship which is 'not for an age, but for all time'—that we are apt to forget or ignore the remarkable fact that this priceless possession is a heritage and gift from the ancient Jewish Church. We are apt to entertain a vague impression that everything Jewish was done away with at the coming of Christ, although Christ Himself expressly said, 'Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.' We are apt to suppose that Jewish religion—the religion of Moses and the prophets and the psalmists—was abolished and superseded by Jesus and Peter

[1] H. Bushnell, *Sermons on Living Subjects*, 266.

and Paul; and we forget that the appeal of Our Lord and His Apostles was to those very Scriptures of the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms. With our half-truths we put asunder what God has joined together. We divorce the New Testament, which is the flower and the fruit, from the Old Testament, which is the germ and the plant. We forget that the New Testament is implicit in the Old, and the Old Testament explicit in the New. We imagine revolution where the facts indicate evolution.

There are, indeed, in the Psalms things that belong strictly to the past—to an undeveloped state of Society and social morality, to a rudimentary state of religious thought. But the text is not of this order. It expresses a pious feeling which recurs again and again, and is, indeed, a dominant note of the Psalter. The affection of those inspired Singers for the Sanctuary of the Lord seems irrepressible; out it must, whatever the theme of the psalm, whether a prayer, or a lamentation, or a thanksgiving, or a sorrowful confession of sin, or a song of victory. 'One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple.' The temple of Jerusalem was the *Keblah* towards which God's ancient people turned the face in prayer, in whatever land their lot might be cast. 'Unto thee will I cry, O Lord, my rock . . . hear the voice of my supplications when I cry unto thee, when I lift up my hands toward the innermost place of thy sanctuary.' King Solomon, in that beautiful prayer for the consecration of his temple, is made to contemplate his people in after times of trouble and banishment as 'praying towards the house' that he had built for the Lord; and Daniel at Babylon is represented as kneeling upon his knees three times a day and praying, his windows being open towards Jerusalem, the city of the sanctuary. The Psalmists regarded the sanctuary with the kind of feeling that we entertain for home. They speak of 'abiding in God's tabernacle,' of 'dwelling in his house for ever,' of 'dwelling in his courts,' and being 'satisfied with the goodness of his house, even of his holy temple.' They never weary of describing the glory of Mount Zion, and the happiness, the exultation, of Divine Worship. It is the topic of entire Psalms. 'How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. . . . Blessed are they that dwell in thy house.'

It was the 'beauty' of God's house that excited the ardour of the writer of this Psalm. The ancient Greek version of the Book of Psalms, that version from which the quotations of the old Scriptures in the New Testament are mainly taken, has an important addition to the sense of this passage. It may be translated, 'Lord, I have loved the beauty of thy house, and the place of the tabernacling of thy glory.' So the beauty of God's House was seen in the fact that God Himself was present.

It is obvious all through the Book that the attraction present to the mind of the Psalmists was not the ritual—not the ephod, or the breastplate, or the curious girdle, or the outer robe all of blue, or the plate of burnished gold with the inscription, 'Holiness to the Lord.' It was not the golden altar, or the table of shewbread, or the candlestick, or the laver, or the brazen vessels. It was not the costliness, though so much was overlaid with gold and inlaid with precious stones. It was not the artistic beauty—the blue, the purple, the scarlet, and the fine-twined linen; for though these things were all things of beauty and splendour, and existed by Divine appointment, and were symbolic of eternal truth and prophetic of Messiah's work and glory, they are not once mentioned—scarcely indirectly referred to—throughout this Book of Psalms. That which arrests attention and inspires ambition is always the moral and the spiritual. The delight of the soul is this—that it is the place of prayer and praise, where men stand to cry, 'O Thou that hearest prayer,' and where they bear the testimony, 'Praise waiteth for thee in Zion, O God.' The greatest and expressed desire for the priests was that they

might be clothed with salvation and with righteousness, and for the people that they might be saints to worship in the beauty of holiness, and to shout aloud for joy. The supreme attraction is just this—'the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth.' 'When shall I come and appear before God?' It is the place of the Divine work and manifestation: 'to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary,' the place where mystery is resolved and sorrow quelled: 'When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me, until I went into the sanctuary of God.' It is the place of conscious shelter and inward repose: 'In the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion; in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me.' It is the place of holy gladness: 'We have thought of thy loving kindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple.' We of a later age can adopt every word. We can repeat and rejoice in every strain. These are our sympathies and our songs. These are the things that attract and fill the soul, and on account of these we love the habitation of God's House.

Thy house hath gracious freedom, like the air
Of open fields; its silence hath a speech
Of royal welcome to the friends who reach
Its threshold, and its upper chambers bear,
Above their doors, such spells that, entering there,
And laying off the dusty garments, each
Soul whispers to herself: ''Twere like a breach
Of reverence in a temple could I dare
Here speak untruth, here wrong my inmost thought.
Here I grow strong and pure; here I may yield,
Without shamefacedness, the little brought
From out my poorer life, and stand revealed,
And glad, and trusting, in the sweet and rare
And tender presence which hath filled this air.'[1]

[1] H. H. Jackson.

One Thing.

Ps. xxvii. 4.—'One thing have I desired.'
John ix. 25.—'One thing I know.'
Phil. iii. 13.—'This one thing I do.'

THESE three persons—the Psalmist, the blind man, and St. Paul—at least knew their own mind, and they had the force which comes from simplicity and concentration, from the single heart and the undivided mind. Psychologists divide our spiritual nature into three departments—feeling, thought, and will—and here we have all three converging on a single point.

(1) *Feeling.*—Amid all the seething tides of feeling and desire, amid all the fascinations and seductions of the world, the Psalmist had arrived at a true sense of proportion, and with a grand ambition aims at nothing less than the Eternal and the Infinite—

From the gift looking to the giver,
And from the cistern to the river,
And from the finite to infinity,
And from man's dust to God's Divinity.

'One thing,' he says, 'have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple.'

(2) *Thought.*—Amid all the quicksands of opinion and conjecture in the world of intellect the blind man had set his foot on one rock of certitude—one foundation fact (like the *Cogito ergo sum* of Descartes) which all the disintegrating acids of scepticism could not dissolve. There may be a hundred controversies and a thousand 'views' about each, but 'one thing,' he says, 'I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.'

(3) *Will.*—Amid all the vacillations and hesitations of the will, and all the cross roads and devious ways of human action, St. Paul had attained to a decisive purpose—'This one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind and reaching forth to those which are before, I press toward the mark.'

1. What do we *desire?* What is our dearest wish, that which we set before us when we wake to each new day's work, that to which all else is merely the means? Are we still absorbed in the childish desire to get; still struggling to grasp the glittering things of sense, whether it be the flowers beneath our feet or the stars above our head; never convinced by past experience that our quest is vain, still assured that though we have been a thousand times disappointed of our anticipated satisfaction that satisfaction still lies ahead, and always hoping that when we have climbed the next ridge the mountain-top will be in sight? It is weary and heartbreaking work, this seeking satisfaction for the hunger and thirst of an immortal soul in things of time and sense. It is doomed to disillusionment and disappointment. At the end of the day we shall sorrowfully sing—if we are not too sad to sing at all—

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see.

Oh! well for us if we have learnt to add—

O Thou who changest not, abide with me.

We all know, if we will allow ourselves to think, that 'man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.' Only the Infinite can satisfy us, and the highest form in which the Infinite manifests Himself to us is love. Only in love do we find that which, like fire, grows by giving and increases by spending. Shall we not, then, close with the Psalmist's choice—'One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple,' which, translated into our modern language, means just that we will desire above all things that peace with God which we find in His House, and at His Altar, and in the highest, holiest love to one another which, please God, we there may learn and cherish?

2. What do we *know?* Ah! there is the difficulty, the special difficulty of these modern days of universal questioning. It is so much easier to destroy than to construct, and to say what we do not know than what we do. We are inclined to cry, like Philip, 'Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us.' If only we could be sure of the foundations! If only we could know God! And that is just what the agnostic says we cannot know. Well, when men call themselves agnostics let us take it at that. When the agnostic says that we can know only the things of sense, in the very act of drawing a line he has implied that there is a beyond. The very word 'finite' to which he would limit us implies that there is an Infinite. You cannot fix a boundary unless you know that there is another side to that boundary. And while we are searching the heavens in vain to find the Infinite, He is close to us. For what is the foundation assumption of all science but that the world is a whole, all of one piece, and that wherever we go, even if we penetrate to the furthest confines of space, we shall still find that all is rational—that there is One Mind at work, One Reason, One Purpose behind it all. And Jesus Christ has revealed the Name of that great Unknown, and taught us to look up with confidence and say, 'Our Father which art in heaven,' and to look down and consider the lilies of the fallow field, and see in them, too, the indications of a heart of love and beauty. It is the little children whose angels do always behold the face of that Father in heaven; and in proportion as we have learnt the childlike purity of heart we, too, open our eyes to that higher world around us, and realize with awful joy that we, too, have an element of infinity; that we, who cannot even conceive an ultimate limit with nothing beyond, have the infinite within us; and that we, who stand outside the time-sequence of past, present, and future, are not part of that time-sequence, but have an element of eternity; that already we are the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be. Blessed are the pure in heart—the single-hearted—for they shall see God. That certitude does not fail us. 'One

thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.'

3. What shall we *do?* When the heart has spoken and said, 'One thing I desire,' and when the mind has spoken and said, 'One thing I know,' it remains for the will to say, 'This one thing I do.' And that one thing is to go forward with single eye, with firm resolve, and with boundless hope, forgetting the things which are behind and reaching forth to those which are before. Does it seem ungracious to forget the past? Just for the sake of that past—that it may not lack its fulfilment and the harvest of its sowing—we may not linger on it in fond reminiscence. It was to the Philippians, whom he loved above all his scattered flocks, that St. Paul wrote of forgetting the past and pressing towards the goal. And the goal to which he presses and bids us press, the goal of the individual soul, if he is to do anything towards building the City of God, the City which hath foundations, is Jesus Christ—'That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death'—so to walk with Him day by day, so to abide in Him, that we may love with His love, think with His Mind, will with His Will, and that at last we, too, may be able to say, like St. Paul, 'I live, yea, not I, but Christ liveth in me.' So we shall be ready for our task—to build the City of our dreams, the City (in Tennyson's splendid paradox):—

> . . . Built
> To music; therefore never built at all,
> And therefore built for ever.[1]

My Desire.

Ps. xxvii. 4.—'One thing have I desired of the Lord.'

'One thing have I desired.' When a man speaks in this way, we have a right to ponder his words with care. We naturally become profoundly interested, expectant, and, to the limit of our powers, critical. If a man has seen one thing that he can call simply and finally the desire of his heart, it ought to be worth looking at. We expect something large, lofty, inclusive. And we find this: 'That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple.' Let us examine this desire.

1. And, first of all, we must free our minds from mere literalism. If we do not, we shall find in this desire many things that are not in it, and miss everything that is in it. This is not the longing for a cloistered life, the confession of one who is weary of this world, doubtful of its promises and afraid of its powers. 'The house of the Lord' is not a place but a state, not an edifice but an attitude. It is a fair and unseen dwelling-place, builded by the hands of God to be the home, here and hereafter, of all the hearts that purely love and worship Him. We read of one who, a day's march from his father's house, lay down and slept; and in his sleep God spake to him, and lo, out in a wild and lonely place, Jacob said, 'This is none other but the house of God.' For everyone to whom the voice of God has come, and who has listened to that voice and believed in its message, the mountains and valleys of this fair world, the breath of every morning and the hush of every evening, are instinct with a Presence. Wordsworth dwelt in the house of the Lord all the days of his life. And if the wonder and beauty of the earth lift up our hearts unto our God in praise and worship, we dwell there also.

¶ I walked with Father Payne far among the fields. He was at first in a silent mood, observing and enjoying. We passed a field carpeted with buttercups, and he said, 'That's a beautiful touch, "the flower-enamelled field" —it isn't just washed with colour, it is like hammered work of beaten gold, like the letters in old missals!' Presently he burst out into talk: 'I don't want to say anything affected,' he began, 'but a day like this, out in the country, gives me a stronger feeling of what

[1] H. Baynes.

I can only describe as *worship* than anything else in the world, because the scene holds the beauty of life so firmly up before you. Worship means the sense of the unmistakable presence of beauty, I am sure—a beauty great and overwhelming, which one has had no part in making—"The sea is His, and He made it, and His hands prepared the dry land. O come, let us worship and fall down, and kneel before the Lord our Maker"—it's that exactly—a sense of joyful abasement in the presence of something great and infinitely beautiful.'[1]

2. Yes, but this world is a world of men. In city or on hillside the great persistent fact for us, the real setting of our life, is not Nature, but humanity. Life is not a peaceful vision of earthly beauty. Our experience is not a dreamy pastoral. There are shamed and broken lives. The world is full of greed and hate and warfare and sorrow. Nature at its best cannot by itself build for us a temple that humanity at its worst, or even at something less than its worst, cannot pull down about our ears. For the Psalmist, the temple was symbolic of all heavenly realities. It stood for the holiness and the nearness and the mercy of God, and for the sacredness and the possibility of human life. In the light and power and perfect assurance of these things he desired to dwell all the days of his life. For us there is the life and word of One greater than the temple. Jesus of Nazareth dwelt in the house of the Lord. Between Him and God the Father there was perfect union. And no one ever saw the worth of human life as Jesus saw it. And no one ever measured the sacred values of humanity as He measured them. And now, in the perfect mercy of God, there is no man but may dwell in the house of God alway and feel life's sacredness amidst a thousand desecrations, and know its preciousness amidst all that seeks to obscure, defile, and cheapen it.

[1] A. C. Benson, *Father Payne*, 226.

God became Man that we
Might learn what a man should be!
How tender and true and strong,
How patient to suffer wrong.
When He for our sakes did die,
And rising, went up on high,
Still God, and still Man, He sent
A Guide to the Way He went,
Who should give to us, day by day,
Grace to live our lives His Way.
God became Man that we
Might learn what a man should be![1]

3. 'To behold the beauty of the Lord.' It is only in the house of the Lord, the unseen fane of reverence, trust, and communion, that a man can learn what beauty is, and where to look for it. Out in the world beauty is held to be a sporadic thing. It is like a flower growing where no one expected a blossom. It is an unrelated and unexplained surprise. It is a green oasis in the desert of unlovely and unpromising things. But for the dweller in the house of the Lord beauty is not on this wise. Said one such dweller, 'The desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose.' He looked across the leagues of burning sand and saw the loveliness of Carmel by the sea, and of Sharon where the lilies grow. To the artist beauty is an incident, to the saint beauty is a law of life. It is the thing that is to be. It is the positive purpose, throbbing and yearning and struggling in the whole universe. When it emerges and men behold it, they behold the face of truth; and if it emerges not, it is still there, the fundamental fact and the vital issue of human life. To dwell in the Divine Presence by faith and obedience; to live so near to God that you can see all about yourself and every human soul the real means of life, and straight before you the real end of life; to know that though so often the worst is man's dark choice, yet ever the best is his true heritage; and to learn to interpret the whole of life in the terms of God's saving purpose—this is to behold the beauty of the Lord.

[1] *In the House of My Pilgrimage*, 65.

¶ 'I do not wonder at what men suffer,' cried Ruskin, 'I wonder at what they lose.' That surely is life's supreme tragedy. It is not that there is not beauty, but that men's eyes have not been couched to its excelling loveliness. It is not that there is not music, music of enthralling sweetness, but that their ears are deaf to its unearthly charm. It is not that there is not splendour of both mental and moral heroism, and sacrifice and splendid endeavour, but that the spirit of man is insensitive, and that he travels in the glorious way, with no sense of its infinite worth and power. The flower is here in its infinite grace and charm; God paints His sunset in colours that baffle the artist's palette, and sets it for a brief hour in the western sky; the lonely star hangs trembling in the darkened heavens; the grave, sweet face of saintliness is full of all the glory of an implicit heaven. But men have not trained their heart to the high vision, and for them the sovereign thing is a thing of nought. The temple is full—full of high disclosures, of sacred presences, and high and sacred worship, and deep and abundant peace—but it is entered by a gate, and that gate, too often, they have not found, or, if they have seen it, they know not the secret of its entrance.[1]

4. 'And to enquire in his temple.' The Psalmist desired for himself an inward attitude before God that should not only reveal unto him the eternal fitness of all God's ways and the eternal grace of all His purposes, but should also put him in the way of solving the various problems that arise to try the wisdom and strength of men's lives. Sometimes the first court of appeal in life, and always the last, is the temple court. When all the world is dumb, a voice speaks to them that worship. Reverential love never loses its bearings. In this world we need personal and social guidance, and there must be many times when both shall be wanting unless we have learned to carry the burden of our ignorance to the feet of the Eternal Wisdom.[2]

[1] G. B. Austin, *Beautiful Gates in Life*, 17.
[2] P. C. Ainsworth.

¶ The saint who wrote the Twenty-seventh Psalm tells us that it was the poignancy of life which took him to church. He went 'to the temple,' he confesses, 'to enquire.' There is a great art in knowing where to face your difficulties. The answer you get to any real question depends almost entirely upon the place where you ask it. There are certain questions about life which I could not answer out in the street; any answer I should come at would be a bitter answer. There are certain places in the world where I could not find any sane and stirring answer to life. But there are certain places where I think I can find an answer to the deepest and most disturbing question that life could put. And so he is a wise man who knows where to face his questions. He is a strong man who will refuse to take up some matter until he is in the midst of things that will help him; until in spirit he gets home.

The great questions are wisely put only when our heads are bowed.[1]

Always in God's House.

Ps. xxvii. 4.—'That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.'

'THAT I may dwell in the house of the Lord'—that is an allusion, not only to the Temple, but also to the Oriential habit of giving a man who took refuge in the tent of the sheikh guest-rites of protection and provision and friendship. The habit exists to this day, and travellers among the Bedouins tell us lovely stories of how even an enemy with the blood of the closest relative of the owner of the tent on his hands, if he can once get in there and partake of the salt of the host, is safe, and the first obligation of the owner of the tent is to watch over the life of the fugitive as over his own. So the Psalmist says, 'I desire to have guest-rites in Thy tent; to lift up its fold, and shelter there from the heat of the desert. And although I be dark and stained with many evils and transgressions against Thee, yet I come to claim the hospitality and

[1] J. A. Hutton, *Our Ambiguous Life*, 23.

provision and protection and friendship which the laws of the house do bestow upon a guest.' Carrying out substantially the same idea, St. Paul tells the Ephesians, as if it were the very highest privilege that the gospel brought to the Gentiles: 'Ye are no more strangers . . . but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God'; incorporated into His family, and dwelling safely in His pavilion as their home.

1. The blessedness of keeping up such a continual consciousness of touch with God is, first and foremost, the certainty of infallible protection. How it minimizes all trouble and brightens all joys, and calms amidst all distractions, and steadies and sobers in all circumstances, to feel ever the hand of God upon us! He who goes through life finding that when he has trouble to meet it throws him back on God, and that when bright mornings of joy drive away nights of weeping these wake morning songs of praise, and are brightest because they shine with the light of a Father's love, will never be unduly moved by any vicissitudes of fortune. Like some inland and sheltered valley, with great mountains shutting it in, that 'heareth not the loud winds when they call' beyond the barriers that enclose it, our lives may be tranquilly free from distraction, and may be full of peace, of nobleness, and of strength, on condition of our keeping in God's house all the days of our lives.

¶ 'A paradise of inward tranquillity,' seems to be faith's usual result; and it is easy even without being religious one's self, to understand this. A moment back, in treating of the sense of God's presence, I spoke of the unaccountable feeling of safety which one may then have. And, indeed, how can it possibly fail to steady the nerves, to cool the fever, and appease the fret, if one be sensibly conscious that, no matter what one's difficulties for the moment may appear to be, one's life as a whole is in the keeping of a power whom one can absolutely trust? In deeply religious men the abandonment of self to this power is passionate. Whoever not only says, but *feels,* 'God's will be done,' is mailed against every weakness; and the whole historic array of martyrs, missionaries, and religious reformers is there to prove the tranquil-mindedness, under naturally agitating or distressing circumstances, which self-surrender brings.[1]

2. There is another blessing that will come to the dweller in God's house, and that not a small one. It is that, by the power of this one satisfied longing, driven like an iron rod through all the tortuosities of his life, there will come into it a unity which otherwise few lives are ever able to attain, and the want of which is no small cause of the misery that is great upon men. Most of us seem, to our own consciousness, to live amidst endless distractions all our days, and our lives seem to be a heap of links parted from each other rather than a chain. But if we have that one constant thought with us, and if we are, through all the variety of occupations, true to the one purpose of serving and keeping near God, then we have a charm against the frittering away of our lives in distractions, and the misery of multiplicity; and we enter into the blessedness of unity and singleness of purpose; and our lives become, like the starry heavens in all the variety of their motions, obedient to one impulse. For unity in a life does not depend upon the monotony of its tasks, but upon the simplicity of the motive which impels to all varieties of work. So it is possible for a man harassed by multitudinous avocations, and drawn hither and thither by sometimes apparently conflicting and always bewildering, rapidly-following duties, to say, 'This one thing I do,' if all his doings are equally acts of obedience to God.

'All the days of my life.' Not only on Wednesday nights, while Tuesday and Thursday are given to the world and self; not only on Sundays; not for five minutes in the morning, when I am eager to get to my daily work, and less than five minutes at night, when I am half asleep, but through the long day, doing this, that, and the other thing for God and

[1] W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 285.

by God and with God, and making Him the motive and the power of my course, and my Companion to heaven. And if we have, in our lives, things over which we cannot make the sign of the cross, the sooner we get rid of them the better; and if there is anything in our daily work, or in our characters, about which we are doubtful, here is a good test: does it seem to check our continual communion with God, as a ligature round the wrist might do the continual flow of the blood, or does it help us to realize His presence? If the former, let us have no more to do with it; if the latter, let us seek to increase it.[1]

¶ We commonly speak of the religious *and* the secular, as though they were two quantities that might run along in parallel lines without flowing into intimate combination. The distinction is perilous and illegitimate. We can no more separate the religious and the secular, and preserve their life, than we can preserve the life of flesh which is divorced from blood. We cannot isolate flesh and blood and sustain vitality. The condition of the life of each is the union of both. Religion without the secular is a wasted and ineffectual breath; the secular without religion is a dead and inert form. And so the distinction between secular music and sacred music, between secular books and religious books, between secular callings and sacred callings, is fraught with tremendous peril, and is usually the prelude to spiritual death. The Psalmist wanted no such divisions in his life. He wanted all the days, and every moment of the days, to be spent as in the House of the Lord. He never wished to go from beneath its gracious roof. He wanted life to be a temple. If he were in the market-place, or in the ways of the crowded city, or threading a sheep-track on the lonely moor, he wanted to have the unbroken consciousness that he was in the Temple of God. He wanted the humblest toil to be as sanctified as sacrificial service. He longed that his soul might be at prayers in his labour, in his pleasures, in his social intercourse, in his burden-bearing, and through all the varied experiences of the complex day. He prayed that he might not be a mere sojourner in the house of worship, but that the incense of devotion might rise continuously from his reverent and aspiring soul.[1]

[1] A. Maclaren.

Responsiveness.

Ps. xxvii. 8.—'When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.'

1. There must be a correspondence to grace, a readiness to hear and to obey God's call. 'God leads those who are willing to be led'; and this is true whether of Christians or of heathens. But what does it mean but that God treats men as free agents? He leads, He does not drive. Apart from what we call revealed religion, God speaks to man in Nature and in conscience, the two witnesses which, if separated, seem to contradict each other. 'Seek ye my face'; and as men correspond to that voice, they are drawn nearer to Him who speaks and learn more of His nature. But without such correspondence on the part of man no real manifestation of God is possible. The voices which once were real may be explained away. What is conscience but far-sighted selfishness, or, at least, a kind of tact by which we see what conduces to the greatest happiness of the greatest number? What is Nature but a great struggle for existence, in which things gradually adapt themselves to the circumstances in which they live? 'I have swept the heavens with my telescope,' said one, 'and I have found no God.' No! for God is a God that hides Himself from such as these. If the shepherds had stayed to reason on the *à priori* probability of the angel's news, they might easily have persuaded themselves that it was but a delusion and hallucination, and plumed themselves on their higher criticism. The Magi might have explained away the Epiphany star. Perhaps it was but an unusual conjunction of two planets; perhaps it was a deception after all, some curious optical delu-

[1] J. H. Jowett.

sion. Why take a long journey without demonstrative proof that the end would be worth the labour? But there was nothing of this. They arose, and followed the leading of the star.

2. But God rarely, if ever, speaks to us except from behind a veil. This is the way most consistent with God's natural dealings with us. He speaks by signs and hints, which loving and earnest hearts can read. There is always, so to say, a margin left for the exercise of that trusting love which we call faith. There is no demonstrative proof in the sphere of the supernatural, any more than in the sphere of the natural. We cannot prove the existence of God, or the Divinity of Christ, or the inspiration of the Bible, by reasoning alone. If we could we should be Gnostics, not Christians; and that is why it is always possible for men to say that the evidences of Christianity are unconvincing. But the triumphs of faith are won not over reason, but in anticipation of reason. He that cometh to God must believe that He is—but he cannot prove or disprove that; and if he waits for such proof, he will never come at all. Abraham, the father of the faithful, went forth at God's call, not knowing whither he went—from Ur to Haran, from Haran to Canaan, and then to Mount Moriah. Was he irrational? Or did the end justify his faith? Cannot many of us bear testimony to the wisdom of obeying God's call, and hearing His voice when He bids us seek His face, though pride and prejudice, and trust in our own reasoning powers, were all leagued together against our better self, which fain would answer to that call, 'Thy face, Lord, will I seek'?

¶ Dr. Dale in one of his books gives an interesting incident in connection with a certain chapel which had a peculiarly noble set of pillars on which the heavy weight above the pulpit seemed to rest. During structural alterations these pillars and the panelled spaces between them had to be cut across. Then, to their astonishment, the people found that the pillars were actually hanging from the very structures which they were supposed to uphold. So, in the last analysis, it is with faith. All human faith ultimately rests on experience, either direct or transmitted, and the real strength of the faith is measured by the directness and immediacy of its connection with the believer's own experience.[1]

3. If it is true that God speaks to us by signs, not showing Himself plainly to us, but bidding us to seek His face, and if these signs become meaningless, or are explained away, or are withdrawn by Him who sent them, if we will not be led by them, it follows that we cannot be too ready to obey the least signs of God's will. It is a saying of John Keble's, that 'the great difference between God's children and ordinary people is, that God's children are always ready to take God's hints.' Sometimes God does speak in terms that we can hardly misunderstand, when difficulties which we never dreamt of are thrown in the path of sin, or when the successful fraud or wrong brings misery in its train. Then we can hardly help feeling that we are fighting against God. But God's children do not wait for such things as these. To them God says, 'I will guide thee with mine eye.' The bit and bridle for the horse and mule, but the Father's eye is the children's guide.

Love hath taught me to obey
All His precepts, and to say,
'Not to-morrow, but to-day.'

What He wills, I say, 'I must';
What I must, I say, 'I will';
He commanding, it is just,
What He would, I should fulfil;
Whilst He biddeth, I believe;
What He calls for, He will give;
To obey Him is—to live.

His commandments grievous are not
Longer than men think them so;
Though He send me forth, I care not,
Whilst He gives me strength to go.
When or whither, all is one;
On His business, not mine own.
I shall never go alone.

[1] J. Kelman, *The Foundations of Faith*, 33.

If I be complete in Him,—
And in Him all fulness dwelleth,—
I am sure aloft to swim
Whilst that ocean overswelleth;
Having Him that's All in All,
I am confident I shall
Nothing want for which I call.[1]

Teachableness.

Ps. xxvii. 11.—'Teach me thy way, O Lord.'

1. This is the language of *sincerity*. We feel that it is the expression of a true and an anxious heart. Are we really sincere when we pray for guidance? Do we ask for the right way with a sincere desire to know it, an honest purpose to follow it at all costs? We read in Jeremiah, 'They shall enquire concerning Zion with their faces thitherward.' People are often fond of talking about good things and ways without the faintest intention of doing the one or following the other. They ask their way to London with their face to Edinburgh. They enquire concerning Canaan with their face toward Egypt. Is our face set toward the pure, the right, the noble? Do we really mean to be guided by God's will, or our own? Are we resolved on following His calling, or intent on chasing our own phantoms? If we are absolutely truthful He will not permit us to wander, but will lovingly respond to our pathetic cry and keep us from every false way.

2. It is the language of *humility*. Great man as the Psalmist was, he was yet most humble before God. Nay, he was humble because he was a great man. The truly great are ever teachable. If we are to learn anything, we must be teachable. To approach a master while saying in our heart, 'I know it already,' is to doom ourselves to ignorance and failure. The Africans have a proverb, '"I know it perfectly," prevents the wasp from learning to make honey.' Which is a picturesque way of saying that people who look very likely to do something valuable, and who seem very nearly doing it, fail ignominiously through vanity and undue self-assertion. Conceit and self-sufficiency preclude instruction and success. They who enter upon the world in the spirit of assurance and presumption inevitably go astray. But if we entreat Heaven for direction and strength with a teachable and obedient heart, God will show us the path of life and grant us the pleasures which are for evermore. 'The meek will he guide in judgment; the meek will he teach his way.'

3. It is the language of *attention*. To be taught, we must take heed; to be guided, we must watch the intimations. Only by sensitiveness and vigilance can we keep in the right way. God speaks in our personal build, talent and aptitude, and we must seek to interpret His will in our peculiar gifts and aspirations. A man's guiding star is not a mystic light in the firmament, his star is in his body, brain, genius. Consider the purpose of God in the talents He has given you. Hearken to His voice in Scripture. Listen to the voice of His Church. Catch the signs of His providence, and take care to improve the opportunities of circumstance. Finally, He speaks to us in His Spirit, directly, mysteriously. Balzac says, 'Genius has big ears—on the inside.' It has a great faculty for catching undertones. So sincere, genuine souls are attent when God whispers them in the ear. Live in the attitude of Samuel, 'Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.'

4. It is the language of *acquiescence*. 'Teach me,' and I will do; 'lead me,' and I will follow. The path of God is the path of righteousness; it is the path the Saviour trod. Are we willing to adopt it? Life presents many bypaths, 'primrose paths of dalliance'; are we prepared to renounce these for the life of restraint, temperance, purity? There are 'short-cuts' to power, wealth, indulgence; are we ready to scorn these? 'Short cuts' are generally dirty bits of travel; so are the world's quick methods of gain, greatness,

[1] C. Harvey.

gaiety. 'Short cuts' are often dangerous bits; so are the world's ways of self-will—the jungle, the lion, the serpents, the banditti, are there. There the enemy lies in wait for you. Do we offer the prayer of the text with a firm and joyous desire to know and do God's will? If so, He shall surely guide us into that path of the just that shineth more and more to the perfect day.[1]

[1] W. L. Watkinson.

'Not as I will': the sound grows sweet
Each time my lips the words repeat.
'Not as I will': the darkness feels
More safe than light when this thought steals
Like whispered voice to calm and bless
All unrest and all loneliness.
'Not as I will,' because the One
Who loved us first and best has gone
Before us on the road, and still
For us must all His love fulfil,
'Not as we will.'[1]

[1] Helen H. Jackson.

FAINTING.

Ps. xxvii. 13.—'I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.'
Is. xl. 30.—'Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall.'
Jer. viii. 18.—'When I would comfort myself against sorrow, my heart is faint in me.'
2 Co. iv. 1.—'Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not.'
Gal. vi. 9.—'Let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.'
Heb. xii. 3.—'For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.'

It is one of the characteristics of our Bible that it addresses us seasonably and pertinently in all the manifold moods and circumstances in which we find ourselves. It seems to know us more thoroughly than we know ourselves, and if we have a weak place in our life it is sure to place its finger thereon, and say—'Thou ailest here and here.' It never utters the wrong word to us, because it reads our hearts unerringly.

We shall find, if we look, many references to fainting, alike in the Old Testament and in the New. 'If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small'; 'The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint'; 'Desolate and faint all the day'; 'Even the youths shall faint and be weary'—such are a few instances out of many in the Old Testament. When we come to the New Testament we find it strangely bound by the recognition of fainting as the danger of Christ's servants. Our Lord Himself in His estate of humiliation said, 'Men ought always to pray, and not to faint,' and illustrated His injunction. The Apostles bear the same testimony. St. Paul, recording a stage in his ministry, made his humble boast and said twice, 'We faint not.' He gave the injunction, 'And let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.' The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews more than once warns against fainting: 'Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.' 'Despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him.' And, to complete the testimony, we have the word of our Ascended Lord, 'For my name's sake' thou 'hast laboured, and hast not fainted.'

Now, there is nothing to which we are more prone than faintness. This is a weary world. It is full of jaded men and women. One of life's primary notes is that of exhaustion. 'My soul is weary of my life,' said a man, speaking to us across the centuries; and the same sad burden falls from human lips to-day. 'The game is not worth the candle,' 'the race is not worth running,' 'the battle is not worth fighting.'

It is hardly necessary to define the word 'faint.' There are few whose experience will not interpret it better than any dictionary—this strange collapse and sinking of the heart, which sometimes lasts but a short while, which in more cases spreads its poisonous fog over whole regions of life, and which sometimes so utterly overwhelms the spirit that the sufferer has but a name to live and is already dead.

We are not thinking at this moment of that weariness of life which gradually comes over those who live day after day for themselves and for their own pleasures. There is a weariness that descends upon lives which have no real and honourable purpose in them. Living for themselves, men reach a point when they do not know what to do with themselves. We are thinking of the higher weariness—that which may come even to those who have proposed to themselves a pure and honourable life.

Let us look, first, at some of the reasons for fainting, and, second, at some of the remedies.

I.

REASONS FOR FAINTING.

1. *Discouragement.*—'Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall,' said the prophet, and his words were addressed in the first instance to a people whose hearts and hopes had been fairly broken in their long exile. So far as they could see, the day of their restoration was as far off as ever. They had reached the limit of endurance. They could now only resign themselves to despair. The day would never break; the shadows would never flee away. Eternal night had settled on their race, and all their glorious history would end in the blackness of oblivion. Even the youngest among them began to faint and grow weary. Even the young men, who in every nation should be receptive soil for seeds of hope and enterprise and courage, began to utterly fail. Hope deferred had made their hearts sick, and had worn down their faith. 'Our way is hid from the Lord,' they said, 'and our judgment is passed over from our God. We have no one in that hard heaven to care for us, no one to see justice done. Why should we go on being faithful? It is not worth while.'

It is a picture of all life. Hope deferred makes a sick heart everywhere. So frail is man that his hopes soon tire if they are not fulfilled and there is no promise of fulfilment. The element of fatigue is never more pronounced than after useless struggling against overwhelmingly adverse conditions—after this beating of the wings against the bars. The bars are none the worse, but the poor torn wings are all disfigured with the scars of failure. A soldier who has won the fight may make light of his wounds in the joy of victory, but in the hour of defeat wounds are sore and hard to bear. Men tire of disappointed hopes; they tire of unrewarded faith; they tire of trouble. In this world of ours there is, for some strange reason, a power of resistance to all our best endeavours and aspirations. We have to make our way, weak as we are, against opposition and difficulty and trial. We may keep on steadily for a while, but then the brae rises steep before us, and we flag, we tire, we slip, we fall. This is what discourages us with life; this is what makes thousands declare that it is too hard; this is what crushes our hopes within us and kills our best ambitions—this strangling, throttling hand of circumstance about our life.

¶ The sickness of heart which comes from the postponement, and perhaps the destruction, of our hopes, is a malady from which we all have suffered. In the weary desert of life we have seen some fair mirage uprise before us; palm trees have sprung upon the arid plain, and given promise of refreshing shade; cool waters have spread themselves before our eyes, inviting us to draw near and rest. We have pressed on with new hope to reach the enchanting spot. But, as we have advanced, it has receded. We drew no nearer to the fair scene. After all our efforts to reach the grateful shade, that we might cast ourselves down and rest, we have discovered that it was just as far off as ever. And in the end the mirage has passed away, the vision of beauty

has faded altogether from our eyes, leaving us to sink in the cheerless, burning sand. Then, indeed, the soul fainted within us. Then, indeed, our life was desolate and our spirit crushed. We felt utterly broken by our disappointment, and in our desolation we were almost ready to echo the prayer of Elijah in the southern desert, when he requested that he might die.[1]

Feeble, at best, is my endeavour!
I see, but cannot reach, the height
That lies forever in the light,
And yet forever and forever,
When seeming just within my grasp,
I feel my feeble hands unclasp,
And sink discouraged into night!
For thine own purpose, thou hast sent
The strife and the discouragement![2]

2. *Chastisement.*—Another cause of fainting is chastisement. We are rebuked of the Lord and we faint.

(1) This chastisement may take the form of a great and enduring *calamity,* a calamity that teaches us that our soul's armour is not proof. The swift sudden stroke seems to separate us from the Lord. It seems as if we could never reconcile ourselves to the inarticulateness of the Supreme Power. Years after we say, as one sufferer did, 'I have had no experience, no progress to put me into better intelligence with my calamity than when it was new.'

It is easy enough to bear the misfortunes of other people. It is wonderful how philosophically we can take our neighbours' calamities. But if sickness, accident, helplessness, invalidism should be our lot, it is a different thing. It does not require much courage to say to a man who is laid on the shelf at forty or fifty, 'Be brave; be patient.' But if we were in his place, should we be brave and patient, submissive and serene? Should we lift our face to those about us and say, 'It is God's way; His will be done'? Or should we fret and chafe and murmur and break our heart about it?

¶ Mr. Chesterton has said that 'the supreme and splendid characteristic of Stevenson was his levity; and his levity was the flower of a hundred grave philosophies. The strong man is always light: the weak man is always heavy. . . . His triumph was not that he went through his misfortunes without becoming a cynic or a poltroon, but that he went through his misfortunes and emerged quite exceptionally cheerful and reasonable and courteous, quite exceptionally light-hearted and liberal-minded. . . . Stevenson was characterised by a certain airy wisdom, a certain light and cool rationality, which is very rare and very difficult indeed to those who are greatly thwarted or tormented in life. . . . It may not be impossible or even unusual for a man to lie on his back on a sick-bed in a dark room and be an optimist. But it is very unusual indeed for a man to lie on his back on a sick-bed in a dark room and be a reasonable optimist; and that is what Stevenson, almost alone of modern optimists, succeeded in being.'[1]

(2) The chastisement may take the form of *material reverses.* Has a fire consumed your factory in a night? Has a strike so crippled you that you are compelled to cancel orders and let your looms lie idle for a season? Has an unfounded rumour shut the door of discount in your face? Has some unforeseen accident destroyed your prospects, some incident of shifting fashion left you stranded? Has the dishonesty of a partner or of a clerk robbed you of the fruit of your wisdom and labour? Then you know. You know how the mind is dazed, how the will is palsied, how at times even faith in God grows faint, and wicked thoughts rise in the burdened brain.

3. *Lack of Endurance.*—We grow weary in well-doing.

(1) We grow weary of *the monotony of the daily round.* It is the wear of life that tells—the steady plodding on at the uninteresting

[1] G. A. Sowter, *Trial and Triumph,* 106.
[2] Longfellow.

[1] J. Kelman, *The Faith of Robert Louis Stevenson,* 258.

duties that never vary; the effort to maintain a patient face and an unruffled spirit in presence of the exasperating nag-nag of an irritating companion; the struggle to be resigned and uncomplaining day after day for years, when life has turned out something of a disappointment; the endeavour to do one's duty and go straight on in a tiresome, unsatisfying road, when something within is longing to leap the boundary fence and roam in those lush green meadows once in a while. It is a noble thing to be brave in tragic moments; but perhaps there is something even nobler than that. It is to be brave, and glad, and strong, and tender, when the sky is grey and the road is dreary.

The longer on this earth we live,
And weigh the various qualities of men,
Seeing how most are fugitive
Or fitful gifts at best of now and then,
Wind-wavered corpse lights, daughters of the fen;
The more we feel the high, stern-featured beauty
Of stern devotedness to duty,
Steadfast and still, nor paid with mortal praise;
But finding amplest recompense
For life's ungarlanded expanse
In work done squarely and unwasted days.

(2) We grow weary in *fighting against temptation.* There is a conflict and a pursuit going on in every earnest heart—a conflict with sin and a pursuit after holiness. The human heart is a battle-field, on which meet the forces of light and darkness; and the moral strain of resisting temptation and struggling against self, the world, and the devil, is inevitably accompanied with faintness. Sins are repeated in spite of resolution and endeavour: infirmities, habits, failings, are so persistent; the means of grace seem to be ineffective and useless; there seems to be no progress; the future looks so dreary; the present is so monotonous; there are so many hindrances, discouragements, difficulties; it is so hard always to do right, always to be denying self, always to be fighting, struggling; we want rest and change, we are weary of it all.

¶ In his *Autobiography* Mark Rutherford tells of his fierce struggle with the drink fiend. On one never-to-be-forgotten night he resolutely put the glass from him and went to bed having drunk nothing but water. 'But,' he continues, 'the struggle was not felt just then. It came later, when the first enthusiasm of a new purpose had faded away.' And, in his *Deliverance* he applies the same principle in a more general way. He is telling of the stress of his life as a whole. 'Neither the first nor the last,' he says, 'has been the difficult step with me, but rather *what lies between.* The first is usually helped by the excitement and promise of new beginnings, and the last by the prospect of triumph. But the intermediate path is unassisted by enthusiasm, and it is here we are so likely to faint.' . . . 'It is here we are *so likely to faint,*' says Mark Rutherford, speaking of the long and tiresome intermediate phase. 'They shall walk *and not faint,*' says the prophet in reference to precisely the same circumstances and conditions. Wherefore let all those who are feeling the toilsome drudgery of the long and unromantic trail pay good heed to such comfortable words.[1]

Oh the regret, the struggle, and the failing!
Oh the days desolate and useless years!
Vows in the night, so fierce and unavailing!
Stings of my shame and passion of my tears!
. . . . . .
How have I knelt with arms of my aspiring,
Lifted all night in irresponsive air,
Dazed and amazed with overmuch desiring,
Blank with the utter agony of prayer![2]

(3) We grow weary in *Christian service.* All who try to do any special work for God, according to the greatness of the task undertaken and the zeal with which it is entered upon, feel very soon grievous and bitter dis-

[1] F. W. Boreham, *The Luggage of Life*, 76.
[2] F. W. H. Myers.

appointment. They are tempted to grow weary and faint in well-doing; they began with such earnest self-devotion, they were going to work God's work, and they expected great results; at least they thought people would understand that they were engaged in well-doing. But they soon find that things do not go as well as they had hoped. There is so little visible result. Those whom they hoped they were helping Godwards break away, and their past efforts seem wasted. And, worse than want of the expected success, they find their very motives challenged or misunderstood.

¶ Someone has compared our undertakings and purposes to that great image which Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream. The head was of fine gold—so are the beginnings of most men's plans. Nothing is too costly, no labour too great. The breast and the arms are of silver. Interest begins to slacken—their views of possible success are modified, they have less exalted notions of what they are going to do. Lower still the silver has become brass—bright as the golden head, but not real, not genuine. They go on with the work, and it looks the same, but it is brass, not gold. The feet are part iron and part clay. Dreary ending to a work so nobly begun—what a picture of imperfection!—a gradual deterioration, gold first, clay last. Such is the spiritual life of many who did run well. Such is the well-doing of many who started with high purposes to work for God. And now their life is jaded, cold, half-hearted. 'Weary in well-doing,' sums up their interior as well as their exterior life.[1]

II.

REMEDIES FOR FAINTING.

It is a great thing to know how to deal with ourselves when we fall ill. And faintness is a kind of sickness of the soul, in which the patient must minister to himself.

What, then, are the remedies for faintness? Let us mention three.

[1] A. L. Moore, *From Advent to Advent*, 95.

1. *Remembrance of God's Mercy.*—'As we have received mercy, we faint not,' says St. Paul, mentioning as an element in his courage the fact that he had received mercy. God's kindness to him, God's forgiving mercy in Christ, gave him courage to go on, gave him faith in a like purpose of mercy for other men. So, amid all the overwhelming difficulties and discouragements that rose in their mountainous menace on every side, he did go on. If we have never known God's mercy, God's forgiving grace to our own poor, sinful souls, then we lack the thing most needful for our own encouragement amid trial and difficulty. We lack the thing that, more than anything else, will put reality into our attempts to encourage others to fight their battle bravely and to lean upon the strength of God. And we lack the experience that, more than anything else, will give us both sympathy for the wrong doing and wrong thinking of others, and courage to believe that neither the wrong doing nor the wrong thinking need be beyond the power of Divine grace to overcome.

¶ God's mercy did not speak its final word when it forgave us at first through the shedding of Christ's precious blood. To this instant it remains available, efficacious, and free. It is prepared to take charge of our daily progress and perfecting, as well as of our initial righteousness. Do not let us fix our gaze so perseveringly on our demerit that we have no eyes to behold the medicine our Lord has provided for just such pithless and strengthless souls. Once it was the medicine of the atoning Cross; now it is that of the longsuffering and prevailing Spirit; and it would be hard to determine which of these two is the more invulnerable. Men and women who have received mercy ought never to faint again. Against all disquietudes they should call in the Grace that is omnipotent, summoning the great new world of Heaven to redress the disordered balance in the old world of their hearts and lives.[1]

2. *Waiting upon God.*—Why is it that we so easily get tired? It is because we try to be

[1] A. Smellie, *The Well by the Way*, 121.

good out of our own resources. We cannot long maintain strength of any kind out of our own resources. If we go on for just a few weeks too long without adequate rest and fresh air and exercise, we speedily find out our limitations. We are sent off to the sea or the hills, and there, with the strain of work removed, we drink in great healings and replenishments. And just as our natural life is fed from the benign restorative forces of Nature, so our spiritual life is replenished from the restorative energies of God. The most determined of us, living on the strength of his own resolve, is but a well-charged battery, which rapidly loses its power. The weakest, linked on to God's omnipotence, is supplied straight from the spiritual powerhouse of the Universe. The unfainting and unwearying God will take hold of His fainting and weary child, put His own Divine strength into him, and make him able for anything.

¶ It is one mark of a powerful personality, that it kindles everyone within its reach. They that wait upon the Lord renew their strength just because they live with that wondrous Personality. There are people who cannot enter your sick-chamber but their very coming seems to make you better. It is not anything they *do* that makes you brighter; the secret of it lies in what they *are*. And when strength is renewed by waiting upon God, it is not alone because of what God may do; there is a deeper and more essential cause: it lies not in what God does, but in what He is. Are you a sinner? He is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and of great compassion. Are you anxious? He knoweth what is in the darkness, and He is perfectly acquainted with all thy ways. Are you weary? He fainteth not, neither is weary. Are you alone and loveless? He is love. They that wait upon the Lord renew their strength, and they renew it because of what He is.[1]

[1] G. H. Morrison, in *Great Texts of the Old Testament*, 62.

Lord, at Thy feet my prostrate heart is lying,
Worn with the burden, weary of the way;
The world's proud sunshine on the hills is dying,
And morning's promise fades with parting day;
Yet in Thy light another morn is breaking,
Of fairer promise, and with pledge more true,
And in Thy life a dawn of youth is waking
Whose bounding pulses shall this heart renew.

. . . . . .

I may go back across the years long vanished
I may resume my childhood, Lord, in Thee,
When in the shadow of Thy cross are banished
All other shadows that encompass me:
And o'er the road that now is dark and dreary,
This soul, made buoyant by the strength of rest,
Shall walk untired, shall run and not be weary,
To bear the blessing that has made it blest.[1]

Such waiting upon God implies three things.

(1) It means *trust*. The Psalmist says, 'I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope'; and again, 'Wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him.' So they who wait upon the Lord trust in Him, expect help from Him, look to Him for the strength of which they feel their need. They have no confidence in themselves, they have all confidence in Him. They are sure that He is able to make them strong, they know He has promised to make them strong, and they honour Him by expecting He will fulfil His promise.

(2) This waiting upon God also implies *prayer*. To trust and not pray is not God's appointed method; prayer must be the expression of our trust. He will be inquired of for that which you need—'Ask, and ye shall receive'; but there is no promise that we shall receive if we do not ask. And so, wait-

[1] G. Matheson, *Sacred Songs*, 109, 110.

ing upon the Lord for strength means asking Him for strength. When you are on the point of fainting, of giving up, *don't*. When you are on the point of sinking down in gloom, lean back rather on the Everlasting Arms. When you are like to faint, pray instead.

(3) Again, waiting on the Lord includes *patience*. Prayer will never avail without patience. Here is where we so often fail. The waiting is too long. There is too great an interval between our prayer and its answer, or between our work and its result. We are impatient, impulsive creatures. We cannot bide the Lord's time.

Let us remember that disappointments and checks are as much from God as success is. Let us be more ready to trust what is gradual than what is sudden. The gourd which springs up in a night withers in a night. Let us try to measure progress, whether in our own soul's life or in our work for God among others, not by feelings but by facts, not by words but by the life. All real lasting good comes after much effort, silently and, as we think, slowly. The bread cast upon the waters may not be seen for many days, or we may seem, like the Apostolic fisherman, to have toiled all the night and taken nothing, just at the very hour which is God's due time, and when He Himself is ready to bless our labour with success.

I waited for the Lord a little space.
So little! in whose sight as yesterday
Passes a thousand years:—I cried for grace,
Impatient of delay.

He waited for me—ah so long! For He
Sees in one single day a loss or gain
That bears a fruit through all eternity:—
My soul, did He complain?[1]

[1] R. H. Benson, *Poems*, 31.

3. *Remembrance of Christ's Sufferings.*—'For consider him that hath endured such gainsaying of sinners against themselves, that ye wax not weary, fainting in your souls; writes the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. He found that his Hebrew friends were lagging, dejected, and prone to unbelief; their faith was not wearing well. They were not giving up their Christianity; but they were departing from the living God; they were drifting away from the things that they had heard; they were even becoming irregular in their attendance at public worship. To counteract this tendency, he exhibited his gallery of Old Testament portraits, examples of faith: then he bade them look to one yet more worthy, Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame.

Here is a standard for us. We have endured much, it may be. Have we endured as much as the saints and martyrs endured, when, for long years, they were tortured and imprisoned? Have we endured so much as Christ endured? These words take us to the Cross of Christ and leave us there—there where surely we shall become ashamed of the little the best of us have done, the little the best of us have suffered.

If all my years were summer, could I know
What my Lord means by his 'Made white as snow'?
If all my days were sunny, could I say
'In his fair land he wipes all tears away'?
If I were never weary could I keep
Close to my heart, 'He gives his lovèd sleep'?
Were no graves mine, might I not come to deem
The life eternal but a baseless dream?
My winter, yea, my tears, my weariness,
Even my graves may be his way to bless,
I call them ills, yet that can surely be
Nothing but good that shows my Lord to me.

WAITING.

Ps. xxvii. 14.—'Wait on the Lord:
Be strong, and let thine heart take courage;
Yea, wait thou on the Lord.'
Ps. cxlv. 15.—'The eyes of all wait upon thee;
And thou givest them their meat in due season.'
Is. xl. 31.—'They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint.'
Is. xxx. 18.—'And therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you; . . . blessed are all they that wait for him.'
Lk. xxiv. 49.—'Tarry ye in the city, until ye be clothed with power from on high.'

Waiting!—it is a hard word, a hateful word, but it corresponds to one of the most frequent elements in human experience. Politicians waiting for office and place and power; husbandmen waiting for the precious fruits of the earth; merchants waiting for a revival of trade; the suffering and the sorrowful waiting for 'the far-off interest of tears'; Penelope waiting for the return of Ulysses, and Enoch Arden waiting for the ship that shall bring him home—the world is full of it, and the cry of it goes up into the ears of Heaven! Sometimes by a succession of incidents there is borne in upon us the amount of waiting there is in the life of man. We see one man waiting for his opportunity, another waiting for his recompense. We see one heart waiting the mysterious leisure of God, another fretting against the procrastination of man. We see one pair of eyes after another straining upon the misty sea-beach to greet some ship that never comes to port. And in such moods we wonder whether waiting be not more than the half of life; and if so, why it should be so?

1. What is involved in waiting? This experience, so common that it enters every department of life, has taken on several meanings which, though fundamentally the same, differ slightly in import.

(1) *Waiting may mean remaining quiescent.*—Doing nothing is one of the least desirable things on earth. It is very enjoyable after months of hard work to find ourselves able for a time to do nothing if we please. Idleness has its own flavour, and the man who can never be idle has much to learn. But much of the piquancy of idleness arises from the very fact that, whenever we choose, we may break through it and do something. To be compelled to do nothing is another matter. To wait—quietly, patiently, indefinitely, perhaps without knowing why—is a severe test of a man's character; but grumbling against the necessity takes from the waiting the true meaning that is in it.

¶ 'To wait, waiting,' he said, 'is not to fret ourselves while we are waiting. For there are some who in waiting do not wait, but are troubled and impatient.'[1]

(2) *Waiting also means alertness.*—It is not enough to remain patient during the time circumstances prevent us from working. We must be ready to spring up the moment the prohibition is removed, and that means that all through the waiting period we are prepared for instant activity. The waiting soldier stands at attention, and to stand at attention is very different from lolling and lying down, and means a good deal of effort, alertness, watchfulness.

¶ At times we meet with men who make a stagnant and slumberous temper of hopefulness the substitute for that practical high-minded conduct that would soon take them out of their straits and perils. Their specious optimism blinds them to the duty of the hour. They wait in a spirit of perfectly unwarranted resignation and expectancy for God to save them from the consequences of unwept and unamended transgression. They wait—oh, how submissively!—for God to reverse the

[1] J. P. Camus, *The Spirit of St. Francis De Sales*, 42.

law of ten thousand years and screen them from the penalties attaching to lethargy. Some door, they are ever dreaming, will be opened to them by the hand of an indulgent Providence, and they will find themselves in a new world. When we see such people loitering about the highways of commercial, municipal, parliamentary, or diplomatic life, expecting the happy chance may come any hour, we call them, rather contemptuously, 'waiters upon Providence.' . . . Providence is not at all likely to do much for these unless in the way of birching, sharp reprimand, and semi-starvation.[1]

(3) *Waiting also means service.*—The idea of service is most plainly brought out when we use the expression 'wait on.' The servant 'waits on' his master—waits to see what he can do to help his master, and does it the moment he has seen. So to wait on others is no dishonour. It is the business of some of us to wait on other men; a good deal depends upon the other men whether we accept the position joyously, or reproachfully and resentfully. If they are sons of Aaron, we shall not know we are waiting on them. There is a wondrous process of illusion. There is a way of so treating men that they shall not feel their inferiority. There is no need to abase a man into some feeling of humiliation. The great fallacy to be got rid of is that there is any humiliation in work.

¶ To 'wait' on may be an honour. Sometimes an organist cannot blow his own organ. There he is upon his throne, all his arrangements are made, and he puts his fingers upon the white keys. He might as well have held them up in the air. Why? Because the blower is away. And the blower has some kind of right to say, 'The music went well this morning.' You may smile upon him, but when he was not there you did not smile. Some of us are but blowers to other men; but then take the higher view of our office, and how useful may the meanest be! There was a distinguished minister in Manchester, and the chapel-keeper said to him, 'When are you going out, Mr. Roby, for your holiday?' 'Why?' 'Because I wanted to fix my holiday, and it would never do for us both to be out at the same time.' The man was right; that is the true recognition of human responsibility and stewardship. See that you are never both out at the same time, whoever you are. There is no small work, there is no drudgery for God; there is no secondary place in the Church.[1]

2. There is a special meaning in the expression 'waiting on God.' It is true in a way that every check to our activity comes from God, and when we are compelled to wait, through sickness, or inability to see our way, or circumstances over which we have no control, we are waiting on God's will to remove the obstacle. But in the Old Testament the expression to 'wait on God' has a meaning over and above this. To 'wait on the Lord' is simply faith in one of its aspects or exercises. The original word means to 'fully trust' or 'strongly hope,' to believe that the thing hoped for will be effected, and so to wait patiently and steadily till it is done. It has nothing to do, therefore, with the off-putting of the impenitent, or with the apathy, indolence, and indifference that too often creep over believers themselves. To wait upon the Lord, instead of being a weak or languid form of faith, is the form that shows most of its endurance and power. To wait is not merely to remain impassive. It is to expect—to look for with patience, and also with submission. It is to long for, but not impatiently; to look for, not to fret at the delay; to watch for, but not restlessly; to feel that if He does not come we shall acquiesce, and yet to refuse to let the mind acquiesce in the feeling that He will not come. It is to trust Him—'Do you always wish Him to pay you in ready money?' asks Mother Mabel Digby.

¶ That word 'wait' is so exceedingly comprehensive that I quite despair of bringing out every shade of its meaning. The word 'walk' describes almost the whole of Christian

[1] T. G. Selby, *The Lesson of a Dilemma*, 222.

[1] J. Parker, *Studies in Texts*, 88, 91.

life, and so does this word 'wait'; for, rightly understood, waiting is active as well as passive, energetic as well as patient, and to wait upon the Lord necessitates as much holy courage as warring and fighting with His enemies. A form of this waiting will come out under the figure of waiting as a servant waits upon his Lord. A true servant is anxious to know what his master wishes him to do, and when he once knows it he is happy to undertake it and carry it through. In great houses certain servants enquire of the master in the morning, 'Sir, what are your orders for the day?' Imitate this, and when you rise in the morning, always wait upon your Lord to know what are His commands for the day. Say, 'Show me what thou wouldst have me to do. Teach me thy way, O Lord: lead me in a plain path. Inform me as to what to seek and what to shun, for my will is to do thy will in all things.' Notice how maid-servants watch their mistresses when they are waiting at table or serving about the house; a word is enough, and sometimes a look or a nod of the head is all the direction needed; so should it be with us, we should eagerly desire to know the mind of the Lord, and carefully watch for indications of it. As the eyes of a maiden are unto the hand of her mistress, so should our eyes wait upon the Lord our God.

I have not yet exhausted the word 'wait'; for we ought to wait upon God as a child waits upon its parent. Our children can seldom be accused of having small expectations with reference to us. They have desires and wants almost countless, and they always expect their parents readily to supply them, in which reckoning I have no doubt they have been strongly confirmed by their past experience. No little child thinks of providing for himself, nor does he dream of directing his own course in life. You cannot get that little head to be thoughtful about to-morrow's food; you cannot force that little heart to be anxious about the next suit of clothes. To all suggested doubt the little lips reply, 'My father knows what I have need of, and I am sure he will give it to me.' Such is the happy, restful life of a loving child, and this is as it should be with us. It is my Father's business to provide for me: his name is Jehovah-Jireh.[1]

¶ What is meant by waiting on the Lord? It is something much stronger and much more vital than is conveyed by the ordinary meaning of the word 'waiting.' When we speak of waiting on anyone, it is usually with the sense of paying a visit, or a number of visits, or else it is used with the meaning of rendering an occasional service. But neither sense conveys the vigorous purpose of the Psalmist's mind, or even the content of the Psalmist's words. The word which the Psalmist uses signifies one thing twining itself round another and clinging there like ivy round an oak, or like a little child with its arms thrown tightly about its mother's neck. To wait upon the Lord is to twine the life about the Lord, to twine one's thought about the Lord, one's aspirations, one's purposes, one's emotions and one's will. To wait on the Lord is to make the Lord the clinging place of the soul, and therefore the resting place, and therefore the growing place—the place where the very stuff and substance of life is created and fashioned.[2]

I.

MAN'S WAITING.

It is a large part of man's work simply to wait for God; but if God keeps us waiting, it must not be forgotten that we also keep Him waiting; and there is often an intimate and subtle connection between the two. First let us take waiting from the man's point of view.

1. *Waiting is not easy.*—True waiting is one of the hardest things in all the world. We talk of hard work. We should talk sometimes of hard waiting too. For work is often sweet and satisfying. But waiting seldom is. Did you ever wait at a wayside station for a train? The minutes seem like hours. Their feet are leaden. We could almost think Time's sand-glass was choked. Had we been working,

[1] C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 1877.
[2] J. H. Jowett.

playing, travelling, how swiftly these moments would have gone. But we are waiting. And the time limps and lags. For we have never learned the secret of waiting well.

Among the few sayings of Christ which are recorded as having been spoken shortly before His Ascension, the charge to the Apostles to 'tarry in the city until they were clothed with power from on high' may easily have been a very real trial to them. During His mysterious appearances among them after that joyous restoration, Christ had told them what glorious things they were to accomplish for Him. They were to make disciples of all the nations, and teach them to observe all His commands. They were to preach the gospel to the whole creation, working miracles in His name and being miraculously protected from harm. And then He had gone to His Father to prepare a place for them, promising to return once more and summon them to Himself. But almost His farewell charge to them had been, 'Wait'—for an indefinite period, which might be weeks, or months, or years. When there was not a day to be spared! They were eager to be up and doing, to prove themselves worthy of the great trust committed to them, to accomplish some great thing for the furtherance of their Master's Kingdom. And they were told to *wait*.

Waiting is a sacrifice of self, a real martyrdom no less than working. St. John by his long life, as truly as St. James by his early death, drank of the Lord's Cup and shared in the Lord's Baptism according to His own words. Over and over again we hear of the hardship that waiting has meant to many who were aglow for work, or sick with suspense.

¶ One picture of Paris, in those first days of August, 1914, comes to my mind now. In a great room to the right of the steps of the War Office a number of men in civilian clothes sit in gilded chairs with a strained look of expectancy, as though awaiting some message of fate. They have interesting faces. My fingers itch to make a sketch of them, but only Steinlen could draw these Parisian types who seem to belong to some literary or Bohemian coterie. What can they be doing at the Ministry of War? They smoke cigarettes incessantly, talk in whispers *tête-a-tête,* or stare up at the steel casques and cuirasses on the walls, or at the great glass candelabra above their heads as though they can only keep their patience in check by gazing fixedly at some immovable object. Among the gilded chairs and beneath the Empire mirrors which reflect the light there are three iron bedsteads with straw mattresses, and now and again a man gets up from one of these straight-backed chairs and lies at full length on one of the beds. But a minute later he rises silently again and listens intently, nervously, to the sound of footsteps coming sharply across the polished boards. It seems to be the coming of the messenger for whom all these men have been waiting. They spring to their feet and crowd round a table as a gentleman comes in with a bundle of papers from which he gives a sheet to every outstretched hand. The Parisian journalists have received the latest bulletin of war. They read it silently, devouring with their eyes those few lines of typewritten words. Here is the message of fate. Those slips of paper will tell them whether it goes well or ill with France. One of them speaks to his neighbour:

'Tout va bien!'

Yes, all goes well, according to the official bulletin, but there is not much news on that slip of paper, not enough for men greedy for every scrap of news. Perhaps the next dispatch will contain a longer story. They must come again, these journalists of France, to smoke more cigarettes, to stare at the steel armour, to bridle their impatience with clenched hands. This little scene at the Ministry of War is played four times a day, and there is a tremendous drama behind the quietude of those waiting men, whose duty it is to tell France and the world what another day of war has done for the flag.[1]

How difficult the task to wait
For promises to be fulfilled,
To stand, and watch, and hope, though late
The coming glory be revealed.

[1] Philip Gibbs, *The Soul of the War*, 41.

To feel and know the sun will rise,
And patiently endure the night,
With eye of faith, through gloomy skies,
To see afar the dawning light.

Full many a fiery soul would dare
The scorn of man, the martyr's stake,
Whose eager spirit could not bear,
Humbly to wait for Jesu's sake.

2. *There is danger in not waiting.*—The familiar instance of the child who pulls his plants up by the roots to see how they are growing is only one illustration of a widespread tendency. We cannot wait for results. We cannot wait for opportunities. To us, promptitude appears to be essential to satisfaction, but we know nothing of the true meaning of the word promptitude; we measure duration by our own standards of time, not by the solemnity and compass of eternity! We forget that the quickest returns are not usually the best. Patient watching is too often treated with suspicion and stigmatized as lukewarmness. Judgments on the deepest mysteries are received without reflection and repeated without inquiry. There are too few who dare to wait and stand outside the battle in which as yet they have no part, who dare to hold their peace till the meaning of the Spirit is clear, who dare to refuse to accept the most venerable human gloss as the full and final exponent of the Divine Word, which still they may be themselves quite unable to interpret. 'Seven days,' so it is written, 'Saul tarried according to the set time that Samuel had appointed; but Samuel came not to Gilgal, and the people were scattered from him: and Saul said, Bring hither a burnt offering to me and peace offerings; and he offered the burnt offering.'

¶ Dante held that Lucifer—Il Primo Superbo—fell, with his rebel angels, within a few seconds of his creation, through the pride which made him unwilling to await the time prefixed by his Maker for enlightening him with perfect knowledge—'Per non aspettar lume, cadde acerbo'; 'Through not *awaiting* light, fell immature.'[1]

3. *There is discipline in waiting.*—Waiting is a magnificent discipline. It touches us just at those points where we are apt to be deficient, and where our need is greatest. It tests our weaknesses and is a preparation for work that requires strength. Life is not all crises: and the long periods of placid experience have their immense value for assimilation and preparation. Do not be on the look-out to mark progress by definite experiences, but trust in the Lord. He does not merely visit at crises; He is present in the calm as much as in the storm. There is a temptation to regard the waiting periods as merely lost time. By the wisdom and discernment that come to us through a long and quiet waiting, we fit ourselves for a continued possession of God's gifts at last.

¶ The response of Lanne's men to his appeal was so hearty that with the help of Ney's van they were able to engage and hold the enemy for over two hours. This was a precious interval for Napoleon, enabling him to secure further reserves and to complete his careful dispositions for a crushing final attack. It was a characteristic delay, for, realizing how impotent to control the close of a battle even he himself would be under his system, he was correspondingly obdurate in dominating its beginning to the least detail. To hold straining columns of eager soldiers in a leash for two hours is serious work. On this occasion, as the Emperor stood by his guard, a nervous voice from the ranks called out, 'Forward!' 'That must be a beardless boy,' said he, 'who wishes to forestall what I am about to do. Let him wait until he has commanded in twenty battles before he dares to give me advice.'[2]

¶ Did you ever watch an untrained collie with the sheep? You know at once it is untrained because it never waits the shepherd's

[1] H. B. Garrod, *Dante, Goethe's Faust, and other Lectures*, 78.
[2] W. M. Sloane, *Napoleon Bonaparte: A History*, 430.

words. It barks and pants and chases. It works heroically. And after all is done, nothing is done. The sheep are dazed. The shepherd is in a temper. The poor dog has been doing mischief and not service. It had far better have been asleep and dreaming by the peat-fire than this. But the trained collie says in his own dog-Latin to the shepherd, 'Take my will and make it thine.' He waits upon the shepherd, and will not stir without his word. And *his* service is often wonderful, just because he has learned to wait.[1]

4. *There is a meaning in waiting.*—If there were no justifiable meaning in it, waiting would be the blindest, stupidest, most souring experience a man could undergo. But the whole point in patient and faithful waiting lies in this, that if a man is willing to do it, he must believe that there is more in life than can be seen at the first glance. It is a proof of his faith in the bigness of life and its ultimate goodness in spite of all apparent contradictions. It gives to religion its grand outlook, its illimitable prospects, its splendour and its rapture. The things we look for lend a sublime import and serene joy to the lowliest tasks of daily duty. Moreover, waiting is a confession of the greatness of God Himself. Because we believe that the mystery that hides so much of life is the result of things too great for our feeble apprehension, we are content to wait humbly and watch, striving to learn slowly, since we realize that God's truth is too great for us to learn in any other way. If there were no waiting, if there were nothing that must perforce be waited for, life would be infinitely poorer than it is.

¶ It is only by waiting on the Lord that His ways can be discovered and understood. Our hasty glances and hurried inferences are sure to err. Several years ago a connection was discovered by a man of science between two sets of natural facts which seem far enough apart, viz., the magnetic currents of the earth and the spots on the sun. It was made in this way: A German astronomer, Schwabe of Dessau, capital of the Duchy of Anhalt, for a very long succession of years observed and kept account of the number of sun-spots seen every day, so that a periodic rise and fall in the numbers were made out, during regular cycles of eleven years, corresponding with a like cycle of magnetic storms on the earth. Now this law or fact was learned by waiting for it. So many years the observer spent to satisfy himself, and so many more years to convince the world. For forty-two years the sun never rose a single morning, clear of clouds, above the flat horizon of that German plain at Dessau, but the patient telescope of Schwabe confronted him. On an average, about 300 days out of every year the observations were taken, so that over 12,000 times was the sun seen, and above 5,000 groups of sun-spots were discovered. 'An instance,' were the words used in awarding a prize to Schwabe, 'of devoted persistence unsurpassed in the annals of astronomy.' The energy of one man had discovered what had eluded even the suspicion of astronomers for two hundred years. This analogy is not so far fetched as it looks. The scientific observer has faith in the uniformity and consistency of nature. He waits for it. He 'believes' that it is, and that it becomes a rewarder of those who diligently seek it.

From this instance we learn what waiting upon the God of natural law means. How far from indolence or apathy! What a constant alertness! What a daily exercise! What a patient continuance it implies!

Depend upon it, those who thus wait upon the God of Grace shall learn greater things than these.[1]

¶ Do not let us suppose we can fully know God, or indeed know Him in any degree, by hasty methods and cursory processes. I have seen personally-conducted tourists go through one of the most interesting churches in Rome in five minutes. Twenty of them had passed by every picture and marble and antiquity in that comparatively short space of time, and were standing on the western steps ready to be bowled off to the next place. That is sacri-

[1] G. H. Morrison, *The Oldest Trade in the World*, 123.

[1] J. Laidlaw, *Studies in the Parables*, 263.

lege. And the thoughtless rush before God, in which we might expect to get all we covet, and away again, is worse than sacrilege. The unapproachably glorious cannot be known in the twinkling of an eye. One of Ruskin's pupils once said to him, 'The instant I entered the gallery at Florence I knew what you meant by the supremacy of Botticelli.' 'In an instant did you,' was the somewhat withering reply. 'It took me twenty years to find it out.' If we wait before God for a lifetime we shall only just begin to feel His enchantments. He is not blessed whose petty, short-lived wants are met at once, but he who is compelled to tarry long before God.[1]

II.

GOD'S WAITING.

'WAIT on the Lord'; says the Authorized Version of the Psalms; but the Prayer Book gives a version that is perhaps even more suggestive. 'O tarry thou the Lord's leisure.' The suggestion here is that not only does man have to wait, but God waits; that man's waiting depends on God's; and that God's waiting is deliberate and full of purpose.

1. *The purpose of God's waiting.*—What is the purpose of God's waiting? It is not for us to know. His purposes are too great for our understanding; but we can see dimly how His purposes are worked out when He waits and keeps us waiting. He waits that He may give us the best and do for us the best that is possible. It may be our power of receptivity He has to tarry for. He is willing to give, but we are not yet able to receive. It was 'when the day of Pentecost was now come' that the baptism of the Spirit was conferred. The Spirit of God, who was in them as the principle of the new life, became manifest to the disciples as the Spirit of Christ when, on the evening of the third day, the risen Saviour 'breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.' Now He was engaged in accomplishing His gracious work in their hearts. Already He had strengthened desire, subdued discords, confirmed resolution, purified love, and quickened faith. And this Divine process continued during the ten waiting days, until they had been brought into the attitude of reception: then, 'they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.'

God's fashion is another; day by day
And year by year he tarrieth; little need
The Lord should hasten; whom he loves the most
He seeks not oftenest, nor woos him long,
But by denial quickens his desire,
And in forgetting best remembers him,
Till that man's heart grows humble and reaches out
To the least glimmer of the feet of God,
Grass on the mountain-tops, or the early note
Of wild birds in the hush before the day,—
Wherever sweetly in the ends of the earth
Are fragments of a peace that knows not man.[1]

2. *The secret of God's waiting.*—What is the secret of God's waiting? God waits because He loves. Love can afford to wait and watch and be very patient just because it is love. When we read about the heathen gods, we find them working suddenly, and fiercely, and unexpectedly. They work. They do not wait, except for vengeance. That was how Greek and Latin poets thought of them, and they so pictured them because they never grasped that the gods loved them. But our God loves us wonderfully. And behind all His waiting lies that love.

Grand is the leisure of the earth;
She gives her happy myriads birth,
And after harvest fears not dearth,
But goes to sleep in snow-wreaths dim,
Dread is the leisure up above
The while He sits whose name is Love,
And waits, as Noah did, for the dove,
To wit if she would fly to him.

[1] T. G. Selby, *The Lesson of a Dilemma*, 233.

[1] F. W. H. Myers, *Poems*, 66.

He waits for us, while, houseless things,
We beat about with bruisèd wings
On the dark floods and water springs,
The ruined world, the desolate sea;
With open windows from the prime
All night, all day, He waits sublime,
Until the fullness of the time
Decreed from His eternity.[1]

Courage.

Ps. xxvii. 14.—'Be of good courage.'

THERE are three qualities, says Emerson in a familiar essay, which attract the wonder and reverence of mankind. The first is disinterestedness, the second is practical power, and the third is courage. Every mythology has got its Hercules. Every history its Wallace or its Cid. There is nothing that men will not forgive to one who has exhibited conspicuous gallantry. Even the dumb animals are ranked by us according to their possession of this quality—the bravest being Nature's aristocracy. There are peoples who make a jest of truth, but there is no people that makes a jest of courage. The love of it, from Orient to Occident, is the touch of Nature that makes the whole world kin. And the reason why war will never cease to fascinate, in spite of all proofs of its illogicality, is because there is in war a matchless stage for the display of courage.

1. But what is courage?

Courage is the calm, determined pursuit of the right, notwithstanding the nature of the road. It ignores the world's flattery, despises the world's menace, and disparages the transient garland and the transient crown. Courage is simply the disposition to go right on, irrespective of the world's swords or of the world's crowns.

(1) There is courage in *silence*. There is no place in the Master's life where the courage of the Lord shone out more resplendently than where it says, 'And he answered him nothing.' It is superlative valour. He is in the Imperial presence, a young Nazarene from a despised environment, much talked about, much sought after. Now He is in the kingly presence, with the prospect of obtaining kingly patronage, of being lifted out of pure localism and made Imperial in favour. We are told that Herod had been desirous of seeing Him and witnessing some miracle wrought by Him, that he might then extend to Him Imperial patronage and lift Him up into specious fame and renown; 'and he answered him nothing.' The valour of silence when to speak might mean gain; the courage to keep a close lip, the courage to restrain a laugh when somebody has made a filthy jest; the courage to present a perfectly passive face when conversation is becoming unfair; the courage to withhold applause when applause would simply add fury to an unclean fire—that is the courage that our Master seeks.

¶ I once asked a man who had 'sat under' one of the most eloquent preachers in Scotland what was the finest passage he had heard from his lips. 'When he said nothing,' was the reply. 'It was at a church-court. A letter had come from the richest office-bearer in his church abusing the doctor for some publication, throwing up his office and leaving the church.' According to the rules of the court the letter had to be read. It was very provocative, even abusive. My friend expected a storm, but the minister only said, 'Is there any discussion on this letter?' No one ventured to speak. 'Then,' he said, 'let us pass to the next business.' 'That,' declared my friend, 'was the finest passage I ever heard from the doctor, and he was the finest preacher I ever heard—*his magnificent silence.*'[1]

(2) But there is courage in *speech*. Nothing shows more radiantly and more conspicuously the valour of the Apostle Paul than that experience which he describes for us in the Epistle to the Galatians, where he tells us that, when he encountered Simon Peter, who was destined to be a pillar of the Church, a living light in the metropolitan church, and who had gone down to Antioch, and had

[1] Jean Ingelow.

[1] W. M. Mackay, *Bible Types of Modern Women*, 204.

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played and trifled with the truth, had worn one coat one day and another on another day, 'I withstood him to the face.' A thing like that is not to be received in silence. 'I withstood him to the face,' warned him, rebuked him, to his face. That required no small valour from a man who was not reputed to be a pillar of the Apostolic band.

¶ She [Sister Dora] was travelling, as usual, third class—because, as she affirmed, she preferred the company,—when a number of half-drunken navvies got in after her, and before she could change her carriage the train was in motion. She recollected that her dress, a black gown and cloak, with a quiet black bonnet and veil, would probably, as on former encounters with half-intoxicated men, protect her from insult. Her fellow-travellers began to talk, and at last one of them swore several blasphemous oaths. Sister Dora's whole soul burnt within her, and she thought, 'Shall I sit and hear this?' but then came the reflection, 'What will they do to me if I interfere?' and this dread kept her quiet a moment or two longer. But the language became more and more violent, and it passed through her mind, 'What must these men think of any woman who can sit by and hear such words unmoved, but, above all, what will they think of a woman in my dress who is afraid to speak to them?'

At once she stood up her full height in the carriage, and called out loudly, 'I will not hear the Master whom I serve spoken of in this way.' Immediately they dragged her down into her seat, with a torrent of oaths, and one of the most violent roared, 'Hold your jaw, you fool; do you want your face smashed in?' They held her down on the seat between them; nor did she attempt to struggle, satisfied with having made her open protest. At the next station they let her go, and she quickly got out of the carriage. A minute after, while she was standing on the platform, she heard a rough voice behind her. 'Shake hands, mum! you're a good-plucked one, you are! You were right and we were wrong.' She gave her hand to the man, who hurried away, for fear, no doubt, that his comrades should jeer at him.[1]

(3) There is courage in *right living*, pure, upright, and aspiring living. It is the pursuit of the right, regardless of the world's menace or the world's frown, the world's allurements or the world's smiles. We have not much need to fear to-day the world's menace or the world's sword. What we have to fear to-day is not the affront of the world, but its flattery and its smiles.

¶ One of the greatest of the European monarchs of this century, in some very suggestive memoirs which he wrote a little while before he died, began to sum up some of his views of human life. There is one sentence which is greatly suggestive, and it is this, 'I have come in my experience as monarch to have a profound contempt for man, for I have found that I can at any time convert the most ardent Republican into the most fervent Monarchist by putting upon his arm a bit of gold lace.' If that ardent Monarch had confronted the Republican with menace the Republican would have stiffened his back in a sterner antagonism, but when he came to the Republican with a bit of gold lace to affix to his coat, his very fervent Republicanism cooled; he was transformed into a most ardent Monarchist. It is that bit of gold lace that works the havoc. Where there is one man defeated by the rabid hostility of the world, there are twenty allured by the offer of a bit of gold lace, and where there is one man diverted from the pursuit of the right by the blast of the world's scorn, there are twenty allured from the pursuit of the right by the radiant influence of the world's smiles.[2]

2. Now suppose courage,—pure, clean, clear courage—to have become part of a man's constitution, what would its influence be?

(1) First of all it would have an influence on the man *himself*.

(*a*) It would have an influence on *his mind*. If timidity or cowardice prevails in a man's life none of his mental powers can work with

[1] M. Lonsdale, *Sister Dora*, 62.
[2] J. H. Jowett.

decision; if timidity is dominant, everything works in uncertainty. All his mental powers move, not with the force, firmness, and decisiveness of the tide, they rather waver with the uncertainty of the surf. If there is timidity in his life the man cannot design strongly, he cannot imagine strongly, he cannot construct strongly, he cannot will strongly, he cannot love steadfastly. If timidity is enthroned all the subject races of the mind will be fickle, wavering and uncertain, but if there is in a man's life a disposition of valour, then everything will work with strong, firm, fruitful decision. A man will plan bravely, he will construct bravely, he will will strongly, he will love attachedly—everything in the mental realm will be braced up, and all his powers will work with strong and most fruitful decision.

(*b*) It would influence *his soul.* Take the word 'soul' to describe the highest part of man's personality, the power which lays hold of and apprehends and appreciates and appropriates God. Would it affect that? There is a fine suggestive sentence in one of Emerson's essays, 'God never gives visions to cowards.' Why does not God give visions to cowards? Because He cannot. Cowards close the doors, shut out the Divine. The light cannot enter the spirit, cannot find access when a man is timid and cowardly; all the entrances of his life are blocked. But if a man is valorous and courageous, having his eyes set on the truth and the pursuit of it, a man is porous, porous to everything that is Divine. The Divine can simply soak into him. If a man of a valorous spirit takes up a book to read, as he reads through the book all that is lovely in the book steeps into him; he is porous towards the lovely and the true. If he goes into a picture gallery all that is wonderful and beautiful and spiritually suggestive about the pictures soaks into him; he is porous towards the lovely. God cannot give these things to cowards, because they are closed, they are non-porous. It was when Peter had become bold, we are told, that he had visions; it was after he had become great that he began to have visions of the ineffable glory. And when a man has set his eye upon the truth in the resolute, determined pursuit of it, then he is open in every door of his spirit to the entrance of the ministry of the Spirit of God, he becomes the tabernacle of the Almighty.

(2) That is how it would influence the man himself; how would it influence *his neighbour?* We talk a great deal about the leaven of hypocrisy, but we do not speak half enough about the leaven of sincerity and truth. Everybody knows that one man can impart a vice to another by simply living with him. There is a most subtle contagion which can pass through the mystic influence of thought, and still more by the transmission of speech, but there is a wonderful contagion of virtue, and a man in whom the valorous temperament is found may give spirit and inspiration to a crowd.

¶ I remember in those memoirs of Napoleon which Lord Rosebery has brought before us and revived again in our minds Napoleon has one or two suggestions to offer about the successful conduct of war, and there is one suggestion in these memoirs which appeals to me as a very pertinent thing even in the life of the spirit. Napoleon says: 'There is a moment in every great war when the bravest troops feel inclined to run; it is the want of confidence in their own courage;' and then Napoleon says: 'The supreme art of generalship is to know just when that moment will come and to provide for it. At Arcola'—I am quoting the words exactly—'I won the battle with twenty-five horsemen. I anticipated the moment of fright and flight, and I had twenty-five men ready of cool nerve and decision, and just at the appropriate moment I turned the twenty-five into the host, and the battle was won.' Twenty-five men who had not lost their nerve brought back confidence to a host who were inclined for fright and flight. The man who was cool for fight brought back the hordes that were ready for flight. Has that no analogy in the realm of the spirit? One brave member of a family may save the whole household from moral perdition; one young fellow in a warehouse may save all his mates from the timidity that means hell; one fine,

brave lad in a school who will despise all meanness and set his eyes upon the true and follow it may gain a whole form for the army of the Lord.[1]

The Silence of God.

Ps. xxviii. 1.—'Be not silent to me.'

It is one of the surprises of religion that God's revelation is not more complete and convincing than it is.

1. We might have expected a fuller revelation of *God in Nature.* It is true that the heavens declare the glory of God, in the sense that they witness to the splendour of a Supreme Power, but it is not true of the stars as Addison puts it, that they are

> For ever singing as they shine
> The hand that made us is Divine.

On the contrary, a more correct interpretation of the 19th Psalm, of which Addison's poem is a paraphrase, gives us a totally different statement—not that 'There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard' but that

> There is no speech nor language, their voice cannot be heard.

That is to say, the universe is silent. It suggests God, but it does not declare Him. It leads the thought up to God, and makes that thought inevitable, but it does not satisfy the curiosity of man. When a modern man of science tells us that he hopes some day to achieve the complete demonstration of God by means of science, we not merely doubt, but we deny, the possibility, because we see that God is a God that hideth Himself, a God whose will it is to dwell in secret. We may perhaps conceive that secret as revealed, but not as extorted by the profane demand of science. We can conceive that God should write His name upon the heavens, that at every sunrise all the angels should proclaim Him, that He should be discerned, with robes of glory, flowing from horizon to horizon, and filling all things; we can conceive it, but when we seek that vision, 'The deep saith it is not in me, and the sea saith it is not with me, neither is it found in the land of the living.' Round the blue abysmal walls of the universe runs the perpetual question, 'Can a man by searching find out God?'

2. Again, we might have expected a fuller revelation on *the existence and nature of the soul.* There is not complete silence, any more than there is complete silence about God—but no revelation that is absolute, that puts the existence of the soul beyond question. Science cannot discover the soul. It goes through the wide house of life with lens and scalpel, but the soul eludes it. Yet we can conceive the revelation of the soul as being made in such a way as to be indubitable. We can conceive that awful essence of ourselves taking shape and speech to itself—the spirit of the dead man seen for a moment before it vanishes for ever, the life within our life making itself palpable and actual in such a way that no human creature should evermore doubt the existence of the soul. It was the prayer of Dives in anguish that the soul of Lazarus, his spirit, his ghostly essence, might appear to the five brethren who were sunk in carnal pleasure, for said he, 'If one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.' And so we are all ready to say; if we saw a ghost we should believe in things invisible, and it were surely a light thing for God to lift that veil of death for one brief instant, that we might be saved from that pit of black materialism which threatens to engulf us. But the reply of Abraham is that men who do not follow the natural instincts of truth and duty will not be persuaded by the supernatural. If our own soul, or the soul of one long dead, did appear to us, we should be no nearer the conviction of the spiritual universe, for we should judge it an illusion, and the soul would be less credible to us than ever. And therefore God's silence closes down upon us when we demand to see the soul. The curtain does not lift, the bodiless essence does not float before us,

[1] J. H. Jowett.

the ghostly hand is not laid on ours; silence, and darkness—these alone confront us; and our 'Lama Sabachthani' above the grave dies away echoless into the empty air.

3. Once more, we might have expected a fuller revelation of *the future*. As we study the Bible we are more and more overwhelmed by the magnitude of the things not revealed. Certain things are stated as facts, but the explanation of these facts is denied us. More than this, a man who was reading the Bible for the first time would be likely to say that it deals with a hundred things in which human interest is faint and slight, and says little about the things in which human interest is intense. The average man does not want to hear about holiness, sin, conversion, regeneration, justification by faith. He is not greatly interested in such themes. But the average man does want to know something about the actual life of the future, if there be such a life, —the thoughts, the occupations, the conditions of those whom we speak of as dead. The average man does cry:

Ah, Christ, that it were possible
For one short hour to see
The souls we loved, that they might tell
Us what and where they be.

The average man, who has looked into the grave does find his thoughts going out into the abyss, and feels that he would give the world to know where his child is, what the wife of his youth is doing, and how the long moments of eternity pass for those who have done with time.

Silence and darkness—that is the reply. One thing only is told us—that the spirit returns to God who gave it, that those who die in Christ are with Christ, which is far better, and that they are for ever with the Lord. It is natural enough, sublime as these statements are, that we should ask for some more definite and detailed revelation. We say, as one of our poets has said of a dear, dead woman:

You had journeyed many times—we learned to miss you,
There was fond and eager talk of winds and ways;
You had waved your hand at parting, bade us kiss you;
But this was for your journey of all days!

How we counted thro' the hours when you had vanished!
How we said, she is here, she is there!
Now the heart on which we leaned so must be banished—
From the Here to the Everywhere.

From the Here, the plain and palpable, to the Everywhere, the vague and vast—that is where the sting lies. We can picture to ourselves nothing in the Everywhere—we can attain no clearness of conception, we are confronted by the unimaginable.

But would it be better for us to know these things? Would entire familiarity with the conditions of the future life be likely to prove a boon to us? Does not the very sense of the sacredness of death lie in its mystery, and would not fuller knowledge be likely to bring lessened reverence? Certain it is that nearly all the attempts of man to inform us what the dead are doing have run into folly or blasphemy, have been absurd or profane, and sometimes both at once. It is probable that we cannot know these things because with our present intellectual and spiritual equipment we have no faculty whereby to apprehend them. But even if we could, it would still remain true that it would be a doubtful benefit to the great mass of men to have a categorical revelation of all that happens in the after life—and so the darkness is the wing of God's mercy, and the silence is His kindness.[1]

Trust and Praise.

Ps. xxviii. 7.—'My heart trusted in him and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise him.'

THERE are two actions of the heart—prophecy and memory. In the morning of life I look forward, 'my heart trusted'; in the afternoon

[1] W. J. Dawson, *The Reproach of Christ*, 183ff.

I look back, 'my heart rejoiceth.' The morning trust comes before help; it is the prospect of the West seen from the crimson dawn. The afternoon joy follows help: it is the memory of the East seen from the setting sun. My heart is like the migration of the swallows. Every swallow makes its first migration in faith. It comes to seek a summer it has never seen. Who told it there were warm lands where it was going? It is an optimist before the fact; it journeys by faith. But when the swallow makes its second migration its prophecy is turned into a memory. It is no more the heart trusting, but the heart rejoicing. Its song has a new significance. It has been helped in the interval. It has crossed the boundary-line between instinct and experience. It has seen the summer of its dream.

Which of the migrations is the nobler? Is it the trusting or the rejoicing, the prophecy or the memory, the journey from East to West, or the travelling from West to East? The Psalmist prefers the evening song—the song of memory. Doubtless the morning migration has its charm, the charm of instinctive hope, unconscious of the storm. But the very unconsciousness is the absence of perfect praise. The song of hope is the song of youth. It migrates towards a summer unknown, and it praises as it goes. But it praises the goal, not the journey. All that lies between is so much waste—cloud and rain and cold. But the song of memory is the song of age. It has seen the summer and more; it has learned the weariness of the flight and the witheringness of the wind. Therefore its praise is precious to the Father. It is no morning carol of the bird untried. It is rather the nightingale than the lark. It is the swallow after migration. It is a song *in spite of* storm. It is a praise of life as it *is*. Faith may sing of the rose behind the thorn; but love sits upon the rose bush and smiles back upon the thorn. Faith journeys from Egypt to seek the promised land; love rests in the promised land, and blesses the journey from Egypt. Faith vows all worship if it shall come without pain to the Father's house; love reposes in the Father's house and says: 'It was good for me to have been afflicted.' The song of memory is a song of praise.[1]

My garden has roses red,
My garden has roses white;
But if when the day is sped
I stand by the gate at night,
The fragrance comes, when the day is dead,
From my roses white and my roses red.

The roses of joy are red,
The roses of pain are white;
But I think, when the day is sped
And I stand by the gate at night,
I shall know just this, when the day is dead,
That a rose is sweet be it white or red.[2]

The Beauty of Holiness.

Ps. xxix. 2.—'Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.'

1. It is as natural for man to worship as it is for a plant to grow towards the light. And that is observable from the lichen in the Arctic Zone, or the poor pale flower in a cellar, to the pine trees on the mountains of Norway. The spiritual organism of man contemplates worship as certainly as the physical organism contemplates exercise, or the mental organism thought. The admonition of the Psalmist to worship was therefore no new idea. Especially was it not new to the Hebrews, for they were a worshipful people. The attitude of reverence was more largely developed among them than among any other nation.

2. Nor was it a new thing to them to worship the Lord. Him they had worshipped since Abraham, their father, followed the morning star of destiny from Ur of the Chaldees and found his way to Shechem. To them the Lord had been specially revealed. He had been their Deliverer out of Egypt and their Saviour in the wilderness. So they worshipped Him. Possibly no religious phrase that the Psalmist used sounded so familiar to their ears as the first three words of the text,

[1] G. Matheson, *Words by the Wayside*, 37ff.
[2] P. Ainsworth.

'Worship the Lord.' But he added some words to that phrase which greatly enhanced its meaning. He said, 'Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.'

3. There is such a thing as holy beauty. It is suggested by the text. The Bible has little to say about beauty, but much about holiness, about morality, about character, about courage, about unselfishness, about love, much about the most beautiful things in the world. It has been charged that the Bible is unfriendly to Art; that neither in the Old nor in the New Testament is there any encouragement to the æsthetic—a contention which cannot be defended. The very springs of poetry are in the Scriptures, and as to Music (poetry and music being the purely ideal arts), it has been truthfully said 'Christianity is the only musical religion.' Yet it must be remembered that the one great purpose of Christianity is not to refine the taste, but to purify the heart.

'Whatsoever things are beautiful, think on these things,' says the Apostle. What things are beautiful? Holiness is beautiful says our text: 'Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.' Worship the Lord in the beauty of architecture. Build temples grand and fair. Let their domes pierce the clouds. That is beautiful. Worship the Lord in the beauty of painting. Let saintly masters dream, and put their dreams on canvas. Let there be such pictures as 'The Transfiguration,' 'The Last Supper,' 'The Crucifixion,' 'The Shadow of the Cross.' They are beautiful. Worship the Lord in the beauty of music. Let anthem and carol and oratorio exalt the name of the Wonderful Christ. That is beautiful. Let organs yield their sweet and solemn sounds. That is beautiful. But remember, all these are means, not ends, and they are worth only so much as they contribute to the beautifying of life, to the production in men of that which is Divine, and hence for ever beautiful.

Is there any beauty so admirable, so satisfying, so memorable as the beauty of a soul who has lived for a noble purpose, who has studied patience in the school of Christ, who has never lowered the standard or played the coward or the fool? That is the finest music, the finest poetry, the finest architecture in the world. Plato prayed, 'May the gods make me beautiful within.' It was the beauty of holiness he longed for. He knew that all other beauty is evanescent. Beautiful faces fade when the light of youth goes out of the eye, beautiful forms waste with disease and age, the hand loses its cunning, and the foot its fleetness, but the soul—time writes no wrinkles on its brow, because the soul is not a thing of time. It is the pitiable weakness of so many ambitious to be beautiful that they have no desire to be beautiful within. They seem not to know that the face is translucent, that beauty of mind and of soul shines through a human face as light through porcelain. Joseph Cook speaks of 'the solar look' in the human face. What does he mean by that? It is the angel face in man.

¶ The eminent photographer, Mr. Mendelssohn, of London, has been taking the public into his confidence. In the course of a most readable article, he says that 'one of the best evidences for religion is the type of face that the essentially religious life produces.[1]

4. The 'beauty of holiness' is not only created in the soul of the worshipper by his own spirit of devotion, it is a reflection of the beauty of the Lord Himself. Psalm xc., that majestic comparison of the timelessness of the Eternal with the momentary flash of life of mortal man, concludes with the aspiration, 'And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us.' How can any enter the immediate presence of God and bask in beauty without carrying some of it with him into the outer world? When Moses on Sinai received the tables of the law and came down from the mount the people saw his face shining with an unearthly beauty, but he knew it not himself. That reflection of the beauty of the Lord was not peculiar to Moses. Those who have lived long in the light, who have spent blessed moments and hours in rapt contemplation of 'the King in His beauty,' grow like Him whom they have loved and beheld. There

[1] F. W. Boreham, *The Golden Milestone*, 271.

is the promise that we shall 'be like him, for we shall see him as he is.' But we need not wait till the soul is freed from its earthly tabernacle to take on the likeness; the likeness may be always stamping itself upon us. There are men and women whose faces, shining with maturing saintliness, are a benison to look upon. Such are found in all the Churches, and they are the most convincing of living epistles.

God sends three preachers: one has might of deeds,
And one has words that spring as living seeds;
The third, a face that heals and intercedes.[1]

The Lessons of the Flood.

Ps. xxix. 10.—'The Lord sat as king at the Flood." (RV).

There is something unexpected in a reference to Noah's Flood here, but the word is never used elsewhere in any other sense, and as it occurs here with the definite article, the Revisers were justified in adopting that reference. What, then, does the Psalmist mean when he says that 'Jehovah sat as king at the Flood'? In other words, what does the story of the Flood teach us?

1. The first great truth that the prophetic narrators of this story desired to impress upon the mind and conscience of their generation was that of the omnipotent and righteous rule of one uncreated and creative God. In the Assyrian story a plurality of gods is found. They quarrel, and the deluge is an act of caprice and passion. But these deeply-religious souls saw and said that the affairs of men were not subject to the whims of the gods; that Jehovah ruled in unapproachable majesty, and beside Him was no other; that the heavens might open, the fountains of the great deep be broken up, and the earth rolled back into chaos at His bidding, for He alone was Lord and God. They saw that He who held the ocean in the hollow of His hand, who called the stars by name, who spread out the heavens as a curtain and as a tent for Him to dwell in, who had laid the foundations of the earth when the morning stars sang together and the sons of God shouted for joy, who rested not and was not weary, whose name was greatly to be feared—that He alone it was with whom reposed the destinies of men, for He had sat enthroned as King at the Flood, and He must reign as King for evermore.

But this Almighty One ruled in righteousness, and when His strokes fell upon the world it was because the world had violated the deathless laws of right. The polytheistic nations round about might conceive of gods moved to resentment by personal affronts and swayed by petty jealousies; but the clear-sighted Hebrew was assured that God's only jealousy was a zeal for goodness, and the only passion His great heart knew was a passion for justice, purity, and truth. The Chaldean might repeat his tale of the quarrels of Ea and Bel, might picture to himself the gods seeking refuge with Anu, the mightiest deity of heaven, and crouching before his portals 'like dogs in their kennel,' even as, to quote another of their grotesque images, they swarmed over the sacrifice afterwards presented 'like swarms of flies'; but the prophetic man of the chosen Hebrew race, to whom the Spirit of God had given understanding, discerned in this, as in every calamity which befell humanity, heaven's just judgment against guilt and sin. The Mesopotamian myth is known of all the Semitic peoples; but with the Chaldean it does but set forth legend and folly, while in the hands of the servant of Jehovah it declares the eternal truth that the Judge of all the earth will by no means clear the guilty, but will vindicate His law, though it must needs be with catastrophe and terror.

2. Another truth taught by the Flood is the invaluable conception of a restored and renovated world—a conception which Ewald says has been the essential element in every deluge story, and a conception which has been common to all the aspiring nations of antiquity.

[1] F. Langbridge, *Little Tapers*, 18.

For those nations, he argues, cherished a belief that in times gone by a multitude of old and pernicious errors were destroyed, and that upon the ruins of a fearful depravity a new, purer, and wiser life was built up. And so, when there came before these nations the dim traditions of a mighty deluge which had once covered the earth and destroyed life, they at once concluded that its purpose had been to sweep away the first hopelessly degraded Titanic race, and produce upon a purified earth a nobler people.

Who is there among us who has not felt the longing for a fresh start of a new race in a new sphere, even though it had all to be purchased at the price of some terrible calamity? In those hours when the failures of life, its falsities and its corruptions, seem to us so vast, so over-powering, so irremediable, we should be glad to think of some interference on the part of Omnipotence which might eventually wash clean, as with a flood, the sin-stained earth, and give us hope of a fairer race in the glad to-morrow. We look round on the seething mass of human life in any of the great centres of commerce and industry, and we are literally appalled by the vision. Drink, poverty, squalor, gambling, oppression, cruelty, lust—O God of Mercy, how dreadful is the spectacle! And then we look within—into our own hearts, our own ambitions, our own lives of strain and struggle. We recognize the selfishness which taints our best endeavour, and the pitiful weakness which mocks each fresh resolve. We feel our miserable incompetence for the work to which we have dared to set ourselves—the work of recreating the thought and life of the generations which are to be. And then—

> Hoarse, horrible, and strong,
> Rises to Heaven the agonising cry,
> Filling the arches of the hollow sky,
> How long, O Lord, how long?

The answer to all our questionings, our doubts and fears, is Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world. He is the new Noah, the true Restorer, the Redeemer of humanity. His Cross is the Divine expression of the worth of each single sinning soul, His open grave the pledge of the resurrection of the world. With that first bright Easter morning the new life of the race began. Thenceforth its upward course, though often checked, is never stayed, and all its being throbs with the very life of God. 'Thou hast conquered, O Pale Galilean' is the testimony of the empires that have gone down before Him and the civilizations that have arisen at His word. But the conquests of the Cross in the age which is dawning must exceed in their glory the far-shining splendour of the years that are fled. The kingdoms of this world *are* become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ. Strong in faith and patience, in work and prayer, we look for the distant but surely approaching day when the Creation itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. The risen Christ, the Lord of light and life and glory, rules in our hearts and reigns in the world over whose sorrows He wept, for whose sins He died. And greater works than Jesus of Nazareth ever did must we do in the might of that Spirit the Father has sent in His name. Before the inspired gaze of the faithful lover of the Christ to-day there rise possibilities of an ampler service, a diviner mission, and a larger hope than the Church has known since angels rolled the stone away from the grave of their ascending Lord.[1]

A Guest and an Inmate.

Ps. xxx. 5.—'Weeping may endure (RV 'tarry') for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.'

THESE words are as beautiful as they are familiar. But they are even more poetical in the original, which is faithfully represented in the Revised Version. The word which we render 'endure' is the common word for lodging, for coming in to tarry for the night. It is the word used by Ruth when she says to her mother-in-law, 'Where thou lodgest, I will lodge.' In the East the rites of hospitality

[1] C. F. Aked, *The Courage of the Coward*, 250ff.

are sacred. If the most unwelcome, the most disagreeable, of guests come at sundown, a place must be found for him; and there he will stay until the day arise—and then he must go upon his way. That fact supplies the figure employed in our text, and it is, indeed, a singularly poetic one. Sorrow comes to us all, unasked, unwelcome, and unblessed. And we are helpless. We cannot shut the door in her face; we cannot bid her go elsewhere. She has come to stay, no leave asked, no permission given. All the night long—the weary, tedious, age-long night—there she is, and her mournful presence fills the house with the numbing sense of pain and wretchedness.

But then 'joy cometh in the morning.' If one could only and always believe *that*, how consoling would be the assurance. Truly the night is very long, and sad, and dreary, and at times beyond endurance, as we say. But we do endure, and the longest night ends some time. The day star shines upon the eastern front of night: then the faint flush of dawn increases from minute to minute, till the sun himself flashes into sight. And when we turn our dazzled eyes to look within, lo! the place is empty: weeping is gone; she has taken herself off; and in her place joy comes with friendly smiling face to bless our going out and coming in. That is consoling, not because it is a charming picture at which we like to look, but because it is a true picture in which we may believe; it is a true account of the ways of God, who hath made heaven and earth, in whose Name is our help.

But is it true that, if a man rightly regards the proportionate duration of these two diverse elements in his life, he must come to the conclusion that the one is continuous and the other is but transitory? A thunderstorm is very short when measured against the long summer day in which it crashes; and very few days have them. It must be a bad climate where half the days are rainy. If we were to take the chart and prick out upon it the line of our sailing, we should find that the spaces in which the weather was tempestuous were brief and few indeed as compared with those in which it was sunny and calm.

But then, man looks before and after, and has the terrible gift that by anticipation and by memory he can prolong the sadness. The proportion of solid matter needed to colour a river is very little in comparison with the whole of the stream. But the current carries it, and half an ounce will stain miles of the turbid water. Memory and anticipation beat the metal thin, and make it cover an enormous space. And the misery is that, somehow, we have better memories for sad hours than for joyful ones, and it is easier to get accustomed to 'blessings,' as we call them, and to lose the poignancy of their sweetness because they become familiar, than it is to apply the same process to our sorrows, and thus to take the edge off them. The rose's prickles are felt in the flesh longer than its fragrance lives in the nostrils, or its hue in the eye. Men have long memories for their pains as compared with their remembrance of their sorrows.

So it comes to be a piece of very homely, well-worn, and yet always needful, practical counsel to try not to magnify and prolong grief, or to minimize and abbreviate gladness. We can make our lives, to our own thinking, very much what we will. We cannot directly regulate our emotions, but we can regulate them in so far as it is in our own power to determine which aspect of our life we shall by preference contemplate.

¶ Here is a room, for instance, papered with a paper with a dark background and a light pattern on it. Well, you can manœuvre your eye about so as either to look at the black background—and then it is all black, with only a little accidental white or gilt to relieve it here and there; or you can focus your eye on the white and gold, and then that is the main thing, and the other is background. We can choose, to a large extent, what we shall conceive our lives to be; and so we can very largely modify their real character.

There's nothing either good or bad
But thinking makes it so.

They who will can surround themselves with persistent gladness, and they who will can gather about them the thick folds of an ever-brooding and enveloping sorrow. Courage, cheerfulness, thankfulness, buoyancy, resolution are all closely connected with a sane estimate of the relative proportions of the bright and the dark in a human life.[1]

No thing is great on this side of the grave,
Nor any thing of any stable worth:
Whatso is born from earth returns to earth:
No thing we grasp proves half the thing we crave:
The tidal wave shrinks to the ebbing wave:
Laughter is folly, madness lurks in mirth:
Mankind sets off a-dying from the birth:
Life is a losing game, with what to save?
Thus I sat mourning like a mournful owl,
And like a doleful dragon made ado,
Companion of all monsters of the dark:
When lo! the light cast off its nightly cowl,
And up to heaven flashed a carolling lark,
And all creation sang its hymn anew.

When all creation sang its hymn anew
What could I do but sing a stave in tune?
Spectral on high hung pale the vanishing moon
Where a last gleam of stars hung paling too.
Lark's lay—a cockcrow—with a scattered few
Soft early chirpings—with a tender croon
Of doves—a hundred thousand calls, and soon
A hundred thousand answers sweet and true.
These set me singing too at unawares:
One note for all delights and charities,
One note for hope reviving with the light,
One note for every lovely thing that is:
Till while I sang my heart shook off its cares
And revelled in the land of no more night.[2]

Immortality.

Ps. xxx. 9.—'Shall the dust praise thee?'

Christ brought life and immortality to light, and only in Christ can we feel sure of the life to come. But there are arguments on behalf of immortality apart from Christ and the Bible, and it is not unprofitable to consider them. Of these arguments there are three that certainly deserve our consideration—the argument from the nature and constitution of all things around us, or, as it is commonly entitled, the constitution of the universe; the argument from moral considerations; and the argument from the general consent of mankind.

1. *The constitution of the universe.*—This argument seems very powerfully to bring home to us that, where the universal principle is conservation, and continuity through transformation and change, man and man's nature cannot possibly be exempted from its operation. What reason can there be for thinking that the principle breaks down and becomes inoperative in the case of things endowed with life? If it does not break down, this question certainly has to be answered: 'When death puts a stop to bodily activities and works great changes in the fabric in which the bodily activities were exerted and manifested, what has become of that to which these activities were due?' If there is to be conservation everywhere, though confessedly with change, then, surely, that which acted, call it by what name you like, must be somewhere, and survive, though obviously under changed conditions. Annihilated it cannot be, such a conception being fundamentally opposed to everything that is observable in the nature and constitution of things.

This argument is of real importance and power in confronting the assertion of materialism that when a man dies he perishes. It is, however, of but limited value with regard to the question of what that is which survives. It certainly predisposes us to accept the all but universally prevalent belief that man consists of two parts—the material, to which we give the name of the body, and the immaterial, to which we give, somewhat loosely, the name of the soul. It helps us, then, to identify the something that survives with the soul, but on its after-existence it throws no light whatever. That light must be sought elsewhere.

[1] A. Maclaren.
[2] Christina G. Rossetti.

2. *Moral considerations.*—The second argument for existence after death is founded on moral considerations, which are felt by many to be of great force and cogency. What, for example, can be more perplexing to every thoughtful mind than undeserved suffering, or successful wickedness, or the countless enigmas in poor mortal life, which seem almost incompatible with any real belief in an overruling Providence, and which, in many cases, make men doubt the existence of any moral Governor of the world? Do not these things all force upon the mind the conviction that there must be an after-life, in which right and wrong will ultimately be dealt with, and the stern law of consequences be fully carried out?

¶ Have got my visiting or visitations all over —a matter of great thankfulness in more ways than one; for the homes of the poor reveal much sorrow which should make one contented with his lot and thankful to God for abounding mercies. Just think of this as the experience of my last day's visits: first house, mother confined to bed; second, a young man, the last but one of a large family, posting on to the grave; third, a young girl believed to have poisoned herself as the result of injured love; fourth, the corpse of an old saint lying in its coffin; fifth house, the young father of a young family under a trouble from which he has no hope of recovery; seventh, a young man, his eyesight gone, lying dangerously ill from inflammation of the lung; eighth, an old man for years an invalid; ninth, mother a widow who has struggled to bring up her family in respectability, and rewarded by her oldest son, who should have been her prop and stay, going to the devil; twelfth, old Nelly doubled up with age and rheumatism, but glad of heart and firm of faith; thirteenth house, a young, good-looking woman bedridden and pained for two years, and sinking fast. I have not overcoloured one bit the facts. If that were a fair sample of human life what a miserable thing it would be, and how vastly would the evil seem to over-balance the good! It is a difficult question to decide whether the good or the ill preponderates. There is just one great fact that explains all this mystery of love, unravels this twisted skein of life—the fact of immortality.[1]

This argument, like the first, is an argument for a survival after death which no serious and reasonable man could lightly set aside; but, except indirectly and allusively, it throws no light on the after-existence of that which survives—that immaterial part of our nature which we speak of as the soul. It does, however, by the very nature of its argument, imply that in the after-existence the great principle of moral retribution will certainly prevail. Of the state of the soul and the nature of its existence, we are, so far as this argument is concerned, as ignorant as ever.

3. *The general consent of mankind.*—The third argument is in effect this—that if we deny an existence after death we place ourselves in opposition to what may be correctly spoken of as the conviction or persuasion of the whole human family. It was once considered that races were in existence in which no trace of any conception of existence after death could possibly be found. But recent investigation has tended to show that, dim and imperfectly realized as the conception of an after-existence may be in some of the lowest races of mankind, none can now be correctly described as absolutely devoid of it.

¶ Take, for example, the African conception as given by a recent writer: Never in its darkest night did Africa deny the instinct of immortality. With the well-known perversity with which expectations are falsified, here is the African prisoner at the bar giving evidence against himself. This is the kind of thing: He has killed a man, but this is no mere dead-and-done-with proposition, for all across the land and moaning through the marshes is the haunting belief that '*the dead do not really die.*' Hence their great system of Spirit-worship unifying the land and life of the African. . . . Take the case of my old friend Kalala, who died the other day: notifying me of his death comes an ancient dame, bleared of eye, an African of the Africans. With not one tiny seed of sentiment in her

[1] *Dr. MacGregor of St. Cuthbert's*, 143.

composition, how does she report on the supreme deprivation of life, called death? Mumbling her old gums she says soliloquisingly, 'Yes, Kalala has left the suburbs and gone into the city.' Again watch how to them Eternity looms larger than time in this fateful, final thing called death. We perpetrate the platitude that the defunct has 'departed,' a poor enough sophism, for if we only waited long enough death would declare that departure-phase deplorably enough. The African with a charming imperiousness which is irresistible says not 'he has departed,' but 'he has *arrived!*' a much more gloriously graphic thing.

Livingstone has been dead this half a century, but what do they say of him? Staggering down to this Ilala grave, he finally died under this fruit tree on the edge of the great marshes: dead? They say of him, *Wa Laala*, 'he sleepeth.' And if all Europe with the sophisticated indifference of materialism insisted that Saint David was as dead as Queen Anne and not sleeping a wink, then all Africa would arise and retort royally, 'Dying he died, but sleeping he sleepeth.' What is more, this much-scared and scandalised negro would tell you that the same death they call 'the sleeping' is also named 'the awakening.' This also explains why his very common word for 'to teach' (*Fundishia*) is from the root 'to die'; for do they not say that death is 'the perfect education' because the dead know all things? This is why the dead are all buried with their eyes looking east: is not their sun rising and is not death day-break? And so on and so on. Despise them if you dare for their conical occiput and receding chin; call them 'child nations' if you condescendingly care to, when you contrast their stunted ethical growth with that of the spoiled and petted children of a pampered civilization. Yet do not for a single moment of time deny that God has hereby made good His word that out of the mouths of these anthropological 'babes and sucklings' He has perfected praise of immortality.

Neither inductive nor inferential, you have all this and much more than this flaming like a fire in the darkest den of Africa: not a dry, discussable doctrine, but an imperious instinct of Immortality. As a duck takes to the water and an eagle to the sky, so surely do they swim and soar instinctively in this idea of Infinity. And if analysis be the death of sentiment, then to dare to argue this would be to desecrate the deep design of God. He who never fails the birds will not ever fail man. It is as sure, aye, surer far than the bee when it elaborates instinctively the cell for the future honey. Surer than the bird of passage never deceived in its migrations; than the instinct of the butterfly and the beetle when they prepare the cradle and the food for the offspring they will never see. The thirst for the Infinite proves the Infinite.[1]

This third argument is an argument that is considered by many to be the greatest and most persuasive of all. But, great and persuasive as it may be, it supplies us with nothing that throws a real light on the state of existence after death. Apart from Christianity, every race has its different conception of the after-life, some of these conceptions presenting aspects of a higher and more spiritual character, but the greater part mere continuity under more favourable circumstances than those which were met with during earthly existence.

What light have these arguments cast upon the mysterious future of human existence? They have made it probable, even highly probable, that there will be an after life; but have they supplied any solid grounds for the belief that this after-life would be life indeed? Could the really earnest and anxious soul be satisfied with the mere assurance of survival after death? Nay more, could it rest even on such a future as is disclosed to us by the Old Testament? What opportunities does the Old Testament future indicate for a life after death of service to Him who called us into being? What realms does it point to in which there will be the power of exercising, for the honour and glory of God, all those faculties that we are conscious, even in this poor earthly life, are the highest and noblest elements in

[1] D. Crawford, *Back to the Long Grass*, 289.

our composite nature. These and a thousand similar questions are called up in every devoted heart when the subject of existence after death is occupying the foreground of our meditations. We soon find, if we have any spark of true religion in the soul, that all our spiritual interest is in that of which the arguments we have reviewed tell us absolutely nothing. They may show that it is probable that there will be a life after death, but of the real and essential nature of that life, its intrinsic character, that which alone makes it worth living, they give no indication whatever. These mysteries can be disclosed only by Revelation, and it is to Revelation, and especially to Him who has brought life and incorruption to light, that we reverently and finally turn. He it is who alone can give to the anxious soul the answers which it is seeking to obtain. And the answers are these: that man does verily live after death, and that, to every loving and believing heart, the nature of that life after death is life with Him. On Him and our relations with Him the whole mystery of our future absolutely depends.

¶ Immortality is the glorious discovery of Christianity. I say discovery, not because a future life was wholly unknown before Christ, but because it was so revealed by Him as to become to a considerable extent a new doctrine. Before Christ, immortality was a conjecture or a vague hope. Jesus, by His teaching and resurrection, has made it a certainty. Again, before Christ, a future life lent little aid to virtue. It was seized upon by the imagination and passions, and so perverted by them as often to minister to vice. In Christianity this doctrine is wholly turned to a moral use; and the future is revealed only to give motives, resolution, force, to self-conflict and to a holy life.[1]

¶ Tennyson said once to Bishop Lightfoot—'The cardinal point of Christianity is the life after death.' Certainly this is the cardinal point of Tennyson's own faith. He believed no less strongly than Browning in the powerlessness of death to dissolve human personality. 'I can hardly understand how any great imaginative man who has deeply lived, suffered, thought and wrought, can doubt of the soul's continuous progress in the after-life.' Tennyson is supremely the poet of Immortality; and the 'intimations of immortality' were ever with him. This is his master-thought, and it was natural that he should approach Jesus Christ from this point. I think Paul's words, 'Jesus Christ who brought life and incorruption to light through the gospel,' summarize pretty accurately Tennyson's view of the mission of Christ. Unlike Browning, who believed that the soul discovers 'a new truth' in Christ, Tennyson held that Jesus Christ brought into the perfect light those truths concerning God and man of which we all have dim intuitions.[1]

[1] W. E. Channing, *Works*, 270.

The Leading Thought of the Psalms.

Ps. xxxi. 1.—'In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed.'

The leading thought that God guides those who trust Him, and never guides them wrong, is the mark, the distinguishing doctrine, the keynote, of the Book of Psalms. Just as we mark in Isaiah, as that which is especially his own, his prophecies of Messiah and of the gospel redemption; just as we say that the ruling and leading thought in St. Paul's Epistles is the doctrine of grace, and in St. John's the repetition of his Master's call to love—so in the Book of Psalms the leading and ruling thought, that which makes it different from all other books, is the belief in God's unfailing guardianship. It is summed up in this verse, which, in a somewhat different shape, ends the *Te Deum*, 'O Lord, in Thee have I trusted; let me never be confounded.'

1. It is the verse which might be taken by itself to express the spirit of all the Psalms. In prayer, in assertion, in prophecy and promise—changed, it may be, in turn of language or choice of words,—even in complaint, in expostulation, in misgiving and fear, in appeals in which are interwoven an agonized

[1] R. Roberts, *The Meaning of Christ*, 81.

despair—this expression of faith appears again and again, running like a golden thread through the Psalms. The verse itself is one that has played a sad, yet high and comforting, part in many a sorrowful history. Like that other verse in the Thirty-first Psalm, 'Into thine hand I commend my spirit,' it has often been the last words on the lips of dying men. The assertion of a hope which the close of all earthly hopes cannot shake, it has offered itself as a stay to the spirits of men to whom hope was over here.

To men of very different times and different feelings; to men dying in their strength by violence, or worn out by long years of toil; to the missionary on his death-bed in a strange land; to the martyrs of the rival creeds of Christendom; to the victims of deadly political strife, at the stake, on the scaffold, and at the block, these words have come back to remembrance; and in them they have said their last hope and prayer, each in his own language: '*In te, Domine, speravi, non confundar in aeternum.*' 'O Lord, in thee have I trusted; let me never be confounded.'

2. And what to these men was the last comfort in dying is the only sure stay and support to us in living. They died feeling that, in spite of dying, they were still in the hands of God. If we would, without distress and weakness, face our condition, we must open our hearts to the belief that, living, we are also in the hands of God; that, whatever we may live to see or to meet, we are never out of the hands of God. We cannot know our fate. We cannot foresee what may befall us. We cannot guess what we may be called upon to go through. We know that we are weak, and that on all sides of us are the forces of evil, the deceits of sin. We know not in what difficult position we may be placed, and with what weight of responsibility on our head. We know not what God may choose to take from us; what light in our sky He may darken or put out; what power in our souls He may cloud over or withdraw. We know not what a day may bring forth. But what we know is, that in it all and with it all there comes to those who put their trust in God a Hand which wisely and strongly orders all things. There comes the Providence which beholds all things from end to end. There is present the same protection of that everlasting Goodness which has never failed those that hope in Him—which is able, through all appearances of loss and overthrow and perishing, to save to the uttermost that which is committed to His charge.

Let us, then, turn to those great truths of God's Guardianship and Providence on which our souls were meant to rest and stay themselves, and be at peace. Let us make them our familiar thoughts, as they were to those who, in their trials, their dangers, their fears, their anguish, rose out of them into Psalms of hope and trust and sure success. So shall we be ready for what may come upon us. So may we look forward without terror. So may we bear the burden, when it comes, without losing patience.

If thou but suffer God to guide thee,
  And hope in Him through all thy ways,
He'll give thee strength, whate'er betide thee,
  And bear thee through the evil days;
Who trusts in God's unchanging love
Builds on the rock that nought can move.

What can these anxious cares avail thee,
  These never-ceasing moans and sighs?
What can it help if thou bewail thee
  O'er each dark moment as it flies?
Our cross and trials do but press
The heavier for our bitterness.

Only be still, and wait His leisure
  In cheerful hope, with heart content
To take whate'er thy Father's pleasure
  And all-discerning love hath sent;
Nor doubt our inmost wants are known
To Him who chose us for His own.

Sing, pray, and keep His ways unswerving;
  So do thine own part faithfully,
And trust His word,—though undeserving,
  Thou yet shalt find it true for thee;
God never yet forsook at need
The soul that trusted Him indeed.[1]

[1] Georg Neumark (tr. C. Winkworth).

In Death and in Life.

Ps. xxxi. 5.—'Into thine hand I commit (RV 'commend') my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.'

Since there are expressions in the Thirty-first Psalm which we find in the writings of Jeremiah, and there is also some resemblance of style, there are eminent critics who say that the Psalm must have been written by the prophet himself or by someone who was well acquainted with his writings. But, instead of seeing Jeremiah's handiwork in what has hitherto been attributed to David, why should we not recognize David's influence in what Jeremiah has written? Why should not the language of this Psalm have been so familiar to Jeremiah, so suitable to his temperament, and so appreciated by him, that traces of it, both in phrase and style, are to be found in his writings? There is nothing improbable in any such supposition.

The words of the text are the words of one who is in danger, yet confidently anticipates deliverance from it. In prospect of the danger he commits to God's keeping, not the life of the body only, but what is far more precious—the life of his spirit. In seeking deliverance from danger he turns his eye within as well as without, and trusts to God for protection, not only from the outward evil which threatened him on earth, but also from spiritual evil, from the sin and wickedness which are destructive of the life of the soul. The danger encompassing the path in which he has to walk is real and serious, but he is not afraid. He commends himself to God, and in strength of faith he as confidently anticipates deliverance as if it had already come to pass. Thou hast redeemed me before, when I trusted in Thee to deliver, and therefore now, when I put my trust in Thee, Thou wilt redeem me again, O Lord God of truth.

1. The words 'Into thine hand I commend my spirit' may be, and often have been, used by one who is near death. They were thus used by our Lord Himself. They were His last utterance upon the Cross. The Psalm is not, as some other Psalms are, a prophecy of Him, except in so far as the trials and the faith of any good man of Old Testament days foreshadow the trials and the faith of One, greater than himself, who was to come. But the Lord chose these words of one who trusted in God in Old Testament days, 'Into thy hands I commend my spirit,' to express the solemn surrender of His human life to the Father. Of that surrender He had said 'No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.' The writer of the Psalm committed himself to God, trusting that He would keep him from the death with which his enemies threatened him; but Jesus committed Himself to the Father to keep Him, not *from* death, but *in* death, and to bring Him again *out of* death. He permitted His enemies to put Him to death, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death—that is, the Devil; and in the very agonies of death He knew that his victory was won. The old words, 'Into thine hand I commend my spirit,' received a new meaning, therefore, when Jesus used them to express His confidence that the Father would preserve Him *in* death and *through* death. He prefixed the word 'Father' to the words which He adopted from the Psalm. That title, which He used by natural right who had said 'I and my Father are one,' 'All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him,' was itself a guarantee that He who laid down His human life as the Sinbearer for man's redemption should safely pass through the crisis of death, which finished His work on earth, and, taking again the life which He laid down, should become the glorified head of a redeemed race of believers in Him.

The words of the Psalm which Jesus used have been used after this consecration of them by multitudes of Christians. The first martyr, Stephen, as the murderous blows of the

stones hurled by the unbelieving and fanatical Jews were crushing the life out of him, committed his spirit to the Son of Man, whom he had just seen standing at the right hand of God. Kneeling, calling upon God, and saying 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,' he yielded up his life. The same words were used at their departure out of this world by Luther, Ridley, Cranmer, and many others. Christians, like Christ Himself, give to the Old Testament words a new meaning. The temporary salvation *from* death which the writer of the Psalm was looking for is not at all in their thoughts. Salvation *in* death and *through* death is what they confidently anticipate. They have the assurance, founded upon the word of God, that, although the earthly habitation of their spirits is about to be dissolved, they have laid up for them in heaven a better habitation of the spirit than this animal body. The dying Christian therefore commits to God not the perishable body, but the spirit. 'Into thine hand I commit my spirit.'

¶ Dr. Stalker, in his *Trial and Death of Jesus Christ*,[1] tells the following story, which he guarantees as true, and taken from a private diary: 'I remember, when I was a student, visiting a dying man. He had been in the university with me, but a few years ahead; and, at the close of a brilliant career in college, he was appointed to a professorship of philosophy in a colonial university. But, after a very few years, he fell into bad health; and he came home to Scotland to die. It was a summer Sunday afternoon when I called to see him, and it happened that I was able to offer him a drive. His great frame was with difficulty got into the open carriage; but then he lay back comfortably and was able to enjoy the fresh air. Two other friends were with him that day—college companions, who had come out from the city to visit him. On the way back they dropped into the rear, and I was alone beside him, when he began to talk with appreciation of their friendship and kindness. "But," he said, "do you know what they have been doing all day?" I could not guess. "Well, they have been reading to me 'Sartor Resartus'; and, oh! I am awfully tired of it." Then, turning on me his large eyes he began to repeat, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief"; and then he added, with great earnestness, "There is nothing else of any use to me now."'

[1] P. 257.

¶ I have stood in Constance where John Huss stood when they clothed him with the sacerdotal robes, only to strip them from him and degrade him. They thrust into his hands the Chalice, gave him the last opportunity to abjure his heresies, and when he refused, said, 'O accursed Judas, we take from thee this cup filled with the blood of Jesus Christ!' And he replied, 'But I hope, by the mercy of God, that this very day I shall drink of His cup in His own kingdom.' They placed on his head a paper cap, in shape like a mitre, on which were painted hideous pictures of demons and flames. 'Most joyfully,' said Huss, 'will I wear this cap of shame for Thy sake, O Jesus, who for me didst wear a crown of thorns.' Then the priests said, 'Now we devote thy soul to the devil.' And Huss, lifting up his eyes to heaven said, 'But I do commend my spirit into thy hands, O Lord Jesus, for Thou hast redeemed me.' They led him outside the city to a green and peaceful meadow. They bound him to the stake. As he lifted his eyes to the sweet sky above him, the paper mitre fell from his head. One of the soldiers rushed forward and replaced it, saying that Huss must be burned with the devils whom he served. They kindled the flames round him. I have stood by the stone which marks the spot of his agony and his triumph, and have thought that I could hear again the words which once more he spoke before his lips were still in death, 'Into thine hand I commend my spirit.' Ten months later, his brilliant friend, Jerome of Prague, was burned on the same spot, on his dying lips the same words, 'Into thine hand I commend my spirit.'[1]

[1] C. F. Aked, *The Courage of the Coward*, 90.

2. But though, from Calvary onwards, these words have been consecrated to the hour of death, they have a meaning also for the fullest energy of life. When St. Peter said, 'Let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator' (1 Pet. iv. 19), he did not speak of dying but of living. We need the prayer quite as much for life as for death. It is best to read this verse with v. 15, 'My times are in thy hand.'

The second part of the verse is more evidently applicable to life: 'Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.' Jesus did not adopt these words. They are less suitable to Him than to His followers. With them it will be as it was with the writer of this Psalm. Their expectation of what God will do for them will be founded upon their experience of what He has already done for them. Past redemption will be to them a pledge of redemption to come. They who are Christians know that through their trust in the great redemption as a redemption wrought for them their sins have been forgiven. They are conscious of their membership of God's family, the Holy Spirit, whom He has given to them, teaching them to look up to Him and speak to Him as their Father. They feel within themselves the influence of that Spirit in daily life, alluring them more and more from evil, making them more and more averse to it, more and more desirous of all that is good. They feel that their course of life has been marked out for them, that their occupations and associations have been chosen for them, that a providential care is continually guarding them and providing for them, that One who sees the end from the beginning is leading them. And whenever through natural frailty, through a weak indulgence of the inclinations of the old nature, they have been untrue to the grace of God, untrue to the better thoughts, feelings, and impulses which have become their own, their way of deliverance has been the same as the way in which they were first delivered from themselves and from the darkness of nature, namely penitent renunciation of sin and trust in past redemption as their redemption.

And all this experience of what the Lord has done and is doing for them educates and prepares them for the confident anticipation of what He will yet do for them. The past is a pledge, an assurance, of the future. Because God is a God of truth, because they know, as they recall their experience of what He has done for them and of what He has been to them, that He has never failed them in the past, therefore they know that He will not fail them in the future. Coming to the end of life in the natural course of things, or brought face to face with death by dangerous illness, they know at their time of greatest need that He who has redeemed them will redeem them still.

3. This committing of ourselves to God which begins with the initial act of trust in Him for the salvation of our souls, and is continued throughout life by the continual surrender of ourselves to Him, is to be accompanied with corresponding work. The Apostle Peter's memory is evidently hovering round this verse, whether he is consciously quoting it or not, when he says, 'Let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him *in well-doing;*' well-doing has to go along with the act of trust and dependence. There must come the continual ordering of the life in accordance with God's will; for 'well-doing' does not mean merely some works of beneficence and 'charity,' of the sort that have monopolized to themselves the name in latter days; it means the whole of righteous conduct in accordance with the will of God.[1]

¶ Few words in the Hebrew Scriptures seem to be more solemnly prophetic than this Psalm. But its use to ourselves depends upon our reading it as David meant it, and ourselves saying, 'Into thy hands I commend my spirit,' —not as a foretelling of the death-words of Christ, but as a simple laying of our own daily life in the hands of its Giver.[2]

[1] A. Maclaren.
[2] Ruskin, *Rock Honeycomb.*

Room.

Ps. xxxi. 8.—'Thou hast set my feet in a large room.'

The writer of these words had left his childhood far behind him. He had entered into manhood's inheritance of duty and responsibility. He had been many a time caught in the coil of adverse circumstance; he had sorrowed and suffered and sinned; he had faced temptation and found bitter proof of his own weakness; he had faced the many-sided and intricate problem of existence; he knew something of the inevitable and the unalterable—and yet, calmly mindful of all this, his verdict upon existence was this: 'Thou hast set my feet in a large room.'

1. The verdict is surprising in a grown man. It is youth and inexperience that find the world a large room. Before we came into touch with the realities of life, while the powers of mind and heart were still untried, we had visions of very wide possibilities, we felt within us suggestions of unfettered and inexhaustible powers. The world is a very roomy place—for children. There are no impossibilities in the nursery. But as the happy careless days are left behind us; as the days come when we have to think for ourselves, and life is no longer bounded by the morning and the evening of each day; as we look back on a past of which we are often heartily ashamed, or forward to a future of which we are not a little afraid; as the rounding years bring responsibilities and sorrows—the world seems to shrink, life closes in upon us and leaves us scarcely room to breathe, and existence sometimes appears a very narrow, limited, and hampered affair.

¶ Those of us who have revisited places and scenes after the lapse of years remember how much smaller everything appeared to us on that second visit. I remember during my college days visiting a well-known town in Derbyshire where I spent three years of my early boyhood. I went to the old manse garden—a garden that had once seemed so large that I felt a little bit lonely when the long shadows of the evening crept across the lawn, and darker shades gathered beneath the trees. I could hardly believe that I was back in the old spot; for I had always thought of that lawn as a prairie, and the few trees had been a forest. The place had grown smaller. No, it hadn't! It hadn't altered by a handbreadth. It was I who had grown.[1]

2. But this man, after having seen the sordidness and meanness and littleness of things, still held that life is a grand, free, glorious gift—that it is liberty and opportunity and hope. What was the secret of his wide and worthy view of life? How had he escaped these narrower and meaner thoughts that crowd into men's minds and belittle their lives? He had laid hold upon God. He looked at life through the Divine purpose. He had found the high and noble meaning of the dusty parable that men call the day's work. When he talks of life as a large room, it is really his way of saying, 'Thy service is perfect freedom.' If life is lived to God, then it is wider than any man can measure. We look at life as it comes day after day with the same duties and difficulties and needs; we face the little cares and vexations that are never long absent from anyone's experience; and life becomes mechanical, monotonous, insignificant. We conclude that life is dull and cramped and narrowed down; and, whether we express it in words or no, the thought of our heart is this, 'Thou hast set my feet in a small room.' And we come to that conclusion because we have missed the very purpose for which God has set us where He has set us, and made us what we are.

¶ If you think you are here in this world to make a name for yourself that shall be in other men's lips; if you think the chief end of your being is that you should enjoy yourself; then your measurements of this room of life are about accurate. But supposing you admit you are here to grow a soul—supposing you discover that there is a spiritual and eter-

[1] P. C. Ainsworth.

nal significance in every detail of the day's life: what then? I think you will be led to the conclusion that you are living in a room that God alone can measure, and you will find that the dimensions of life are infinite. If you are bent on what you call good fortune, then very likely life is a meagre and contemptible chance; but if your heart is set on a good character, then opportunity assumes boundless proportions. Life is a pitiably small room for the people who do not know why they are here at all; or who, knowing something of life's highest purposes and ends, deliberately seek something lower than the highest and less than the best. If your shop is only a place for merchandise; if your kitchen has nothing more than a domestic significance; then I confess life is a very small affair, and it is a great question whether it is really worth while going on with it at all. But God means you to get beyond the brief moment and the earthly means, into the vast eternal reason for existence. Buying and selling are small things; but honesty is a very great thing. There is nothing very significant or impressive about the household work; but patience and kindliness, and service of one another are great, deathless things. The pains that our bodies suffer, the fret and jar of circumstance and all life's common necessities, are small things in themselves; but the courage and sympathy and self-control and unselfishness that in the purpose of God are to grow out of these things, are great with a greatness we cannot at present estimate.[1]

¶ Writing to a recent issue of a religious weekly, a correspondent says: 'A month or so back I was aware that I was dropping into "a fit of the blues." The case was this. I was cycling out on a raw, dull November afternoon to a distant village to take a week-night service. I knew it would be dull, for the singing would have no life in it, the faithful souls would be few and without any outward sign of great eagerness to be taught anything; the schoolroom would be cold, for probably the heating apparatus would consist of a few oil lamps lighted half-an-hour before the service began, and the whole prospect was dreary. But I was comforted by recalling a parable that ran somewhat like this: A certain man went into a mason's yard and saw three men working at some stones, hewing and moulding them to some design. "What are you doing?" he asked one man. "Chipping this 'ere bit of stone." When the next man was asked he replied, "Earning my living for myself and family." "And you?" he asked a third. "Building a cathedral," was the reply. The parable lighted my journey, for as I conducted that service I was able to lift my eyes beyond the narrow surroundings and to realise that in my own small way I was building up the Kingdom. It was not romantic, it was not exhilarating; but as I looked on the schoolroom the light of the far-off horizon threw an ennobling light upon the task in hand. I felt I was heaving one more block into its place, perchance polishing one more surface, or adding one more foundation-stone to that building in which He may dwell, when the Lord comes to His fair temple in humanity. I was rebuked, humbled—and comforted!'

3. But, further, those are the words of a man who has felt the force of his own immortality. He has found that on one side of this room of life there is no wall to limit and fold us. Life goes out into God's eternity. That is where God has fashioned it to go. Too often we find our eternity in the calendar, and measure infinity by a foot-rule. We think there is nothing in this room of life that cannot be submitted to our chronology and our mensuration. 'Thou hast set my feet in a small room. I know it is small; I have measured it, I have sat in it and listened to the ticking of the seconds and the chiming of the hours.' O foolish one! You have measured only three sides of that room. You cannot measure the fourth side unless you can measure God.

We batter and bruise ourselves against the hard wall of life's stern necessities, its painful compulsions, its seemingly unheeding laws; and we deduce from our aching spirits

[1] P. C. Ainsworth.

a parable of life's narrowness. And yet, if we but recognized it, if we but trusted our hearts instead of our eyes, we should know that God is the soul's circumstance, and His infinitude is its breathing-space. 'Thou hast set my feet in a large room'—for Thou hast set me to live where I may find Thee, and serve Thee, and grow like unto Thee. I have Thy mercy to live by, Thy work to do, Thy heaven to win; and that is enough—for it is all.

Thou call'st 'thine own' a narrow spot,
And frettest; but hast thou forgot
That far and far this earth is spread,
The one sky stretching overhead?
One earth, one sky, one common air,
One household, 'neath one Father's care.
Thou toil'st to build thy selfish walls;
But, when the evening shadow falls,
Thy Father's voice thou'lt gladly hear,
'Come home, my child, for night is near!'
Then, looking backward o'er the day,
Thy walls will show as children's play,—
As children's play, who set apart
Their garden-beds with careful art,
What time their father claims alone
The whole wide garden for his own![1]

My Times.

Ps. xxxi. 15.—'My times are in thy hand.'

'My times'—that is, the changes that await me, the various casualties of life, my ups and downs, and all my chequered history—all these are in the hand of the Lord, and I am glad to have it so. I am not the sport of chance, or the helpless victim of fate, or the child of fickle fortune. There is a Providence, and that Providence cares for me. I am at the disposal of a loving Father, who arranges all my affairs for me with a wisdom that never errs and a love that never changes. Nothing can befall me that is not of His appointment. I can never drift beyond His reach and care. He it is who brings me into this world, and He it is who takes me out of it, and how long or how short a time I shall stay here is all fixed for me by Him. 'My times,' whether they be times of revival or times of depression, times of gladness or times of grief, times of illness or times of health—all my times are in His hand.

Once in that hand, they may be left there without anxiety. Belief in Providence is the best cure for care. It is the end of all worry. Why vex ourselves about anything that is in the hand of God? Is it not in the best hand it can be in? Is it not in a hand capable of managing it, and bringing it to a happy issue?

1. *Our days are numbered.*—This is the plea of the Psalmist. 'The days of our years are threescore years and ten.' Our days are computed, our career is mapped, our way is ordered. The whole field has been staked out accurately. We will go to our offices so many times. Someone does the reckoning. The sun rose this morning at such and such an hour. It will set at such and such another hour. Nothing can hurry or hinder its decline. We have a modern invention called the time lock. It is seen in every vault of safe deposit. When the door is shut, and the opening timed for a certain hour, no combination can turn the bolt and swing it ajar until that hour arrives.

This, too, was the teaching of the Master. If God has given us a certain work to do, there is no power to harm us till that work is done. If it is an eight hours' task, we shall have eight hours in which to finish it. This is not fatalism. It is Fatherhood. It is love. If God did not want us, He would not have created us. There is plenty of time to do our work, but none to lose. Plenty of light to see our duty, but none to waste. 'I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.' So never let us run away from danger if we are in the line of duty. If a man is led by God, he will be led to victory. We have our day. Its morning and evening have been fixed. Nothing can shorten it. Nothing can lengthen it. It is only wickedness that does not live out half its time. A good life is never fragmentary. There is nothing premature about a good man's death. When we

[1] Harriet W. Hall.

think so, we forget that men serve God yonder as well as here. Why be nervous about death? The time of it, the manner of it, the issue of it, are all foreseen and determined for us. 'The close of life,' says one, 'is not decided by the sharp knife of the fates, but by the hand of love. You shall not die before your time, neither shall you be forgotten, or left upon the stage too long.'

3. *Our days are in God's hands.*—And this is not calling us to put on sackcloth, for, if they are in God's hands, they are in good hands. They surely could not be in better keeping. 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.' Is it? God is love. Is it a fearful thing to fall into the hands of love? Yes, as a rebel. But for the Christian it is a blessed experience. For the Christian the fall is a flight, the sinking is a soaring, the prostration is a promotion. It means slipping into the clasp of his Father.

And, if this be so, how foolish a thing is worry! How undutiful! How distrustful! Nothing has any power against us. No evil can harm us. No plague can come nigh our dwelling. Someone speaks of drinking the cup of affliction. Well, what if we are called upon to drink it? It is only a cupful: even if we are made to drink it all, it cannot hurt us. Our Heavenly Father will not give any of us more than we can bear.

¶ I remember reading a story about a man called Billy Bray, the famous Cornish miner. He was quite a well-known character in his day. In his last illness he was taken down to the seashore, and the fishermen used to take him out in their boats. On one such occasion a storm arose and the sea was lashed into fury. One of the sailors said to him, 'Mr .Bray, are you not afraid of the storm?' 'Afraid?' said Billy Bray. 'Why should I be afraid? If my Father has more work for me ashore, He will not let me drown. If He has nothing more for me to do, I should as lief go to heaven by sea as by land.' This is not Stoicism, nor is it Fatalism. It is what Dr. Rendel Harris calls, in Greek, *Ataraxia,* undisturbedness—the peace which comes of Vision.[1]

[1] M. J. Macleod, *The Unsearchable Riches,* 155.

Goodness in Store.

Ps. xxxi. 19.—'Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee.'

How came the Psalmists to conceive of the goodness of God so largely and so certainly as practically to rule their lives by the feeling of it? 'Goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life.' 'Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.' It was not because they did not realize the sorrow and the mystery of pain: they cried out because of it; and yet the strong feeling that God is good always triumphs. He *is* good, these mysterious sufferings notwithstanding. God's mill grinds on, and crushes our precious things; but the proofs of His goodness are too palpable to be discredited even by the mystery of pain. Religious feeling and faith vanquish the dark sceptical mood. 'Nevertheless I am continually with thee; thou hast holden me by my right hand. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.' 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.' This feeling works strongly in the Thirty-first Psalm.

And this particular verse is one of those pearls of luminous beauty which great tempests of the soul sometimes throw up. Even among these lofty and manifold celebrations of the Divine goodness, its spiritual insight, its largeness of recognition, its fine imaginative conceptions are remarkable. It is the poetic expression of a profound religious philosophy. It conceives of God's goodness, of God's beneficent provision for men, not as a mere benevolent impulse, a good-natured interposition in the moment of exigency, but as a purposed and prepared goodness—goodness 'laid up,' fore-ordained, and calculated, as the appointed order and ministry of human life. So that, when the moment of necessity comes, we find it anticipated by a prepared and calculated provision for it. The poetic conception is goodness laid up in treasures as corn is laid up in barns.

It is a remarkable conception of God, full of great practical inspirations. It were a very inferior conception to think of God as simply doing beneficent things, acting from benevolent impulses. The greatness and depth and strong assurance of the Psalmist's conception is that nothing that God can do can be other than good; that goodness is so essentially the quality of His nature that all His purposes, all His plans, all His methods are inspired and ruled by it. So that if He call into existence any creature, all provisions made for it must be determined by pure goodness. Possibly the Psalmist may be thinking only of religious things, of the way in which religious life and satisfactions are wrought by processes of suffering. Still it is a necessary description of all that God does: the entire order of things, the constitution of physical nature, the principles and methods of providential government, the religious relations of men to God—all are alike parts of a universal order of Divine goodness.

1. If we take merely the *physical creation,* what an exhaustless field of illustration it opens out to us! The coal that warms our homes and drives our engines and factories was stored away in the earth ages upon ages ago. God laid it up for the use of His children thousands of years before they appeared upon the earth. So of the iron and copper and lead, so of the precious metals. They were all here when man came; and it is not too much to say that they were prepared by processes of Nature in anticipation of his advent. They have no meaning, and no reason for existence, so far as we can see, apart from the uses of man.

From metals and minerals pass to forces. This is what may be called the electric age, but the subtle agent which warrants the phrase has been in the world from the beginning. Earth and sea and air are full of it, and always have been, but not until a generation ago did man begin to make large drafts upon this stored-up goodness of God. We had the telegraph, to be sure, but beyond that little was known, and little use was made of electricity. To-day, however, we apply it in a thousand ways. It rings our bells, it lights our homes and our streets, it propels our cars, it does service in office and picture gallery, it is the motor power of factories, and is made to contribute to human comfort in countless directions. But the treasures of electricity have scarcely been touched on yet. It has more in store for man than has ever entered into his boldest dreams. These are only hints of the laid-up goodness of God in the physical universe around us. Much has come to light; but far more is coming. Think of the wonders of wireless; think what may be expected if the energy of the atom can be released. Forces and resources as old as Time will yet be discovered and made to serve the uses of man. His mastery of Nature will go on and on, and the achievements of the past in disclosing the secrets of the earth will be as nothing compared with the achievements of the future. And every step of advancement, every new invention, every additional discovery will but emphasize the laid-up goodness of God.

¶ In Switzerland and Norway the snow on the tops of the lofty mountains never melts summer or winter. It remains and accumulates, and by its own weight it presses downwards and forms in the hollows those great streams of solid ice which are called glaciers. These glaciers move onwards at a rate so very slow that if you were watching them a whole day you would see little or no change in their appearance; and at last they reach a point far below, where the air is so warm that the end of the icy mass melts and forms rivers, which flow to the sea. God by this wonderful provision of nature lays up in store vast quantities of water upon the mountains for the refreshment of the valleys and plains at their foot. Without these glaciers the moisture that falls upon the mountain tops would speedily run off in raging torrents, scattering ruin over all the fields below. But by the help of these glaciers the water is brought down to the places where it is needed in a manner so gradual and so continuous that there is never any risk of a too scanty or a too copious supply.[1]

[1] H. Macmillan, *The Gate Beautiful,* 255.

2. Another series of illustrations may be derived from the providence of *human life*—the plans and processes by which the great ends of human life are accomplished. Here again may we not recognize a storage of goodness laid up?

(1) Take the history of *the race:* the rise, progress, and ministry of each separate community and nation; and then the confluence of national movements, bringing about the beneficent end. Can we resist the conclusion that human history has been, not a fortuitous concourse of impulses, but the development of an intelligent purpose and plan? Look at it at any one given moment. The play of forces is as tumultuous and confusing as the motions of complex machinery to an ignorant observer. But the issue proves that—

> Through the ages one increasing purpose runs,
> And the thoughts of men are widened with the process of the suns.

Nations are developed, not by resistless acts of autocratic power, but by inspirations and exercises of their own thoughts and faculties; through circumstances with which they have to deal, difficulties of Nature which they have to overcome. The ground must be cultivated for the production of food, the properties of things must be discovered and utilized, changing conditions of social and civic life must be made to help in higher developments. Thus, through mistakes and crimes, through epidemics of disease, through wicked wars and social wrongs, as well as through direct teachings of right, the world has made progress.

The process is to be completed in the universal Kingdom of God among the nations; when 'all shall know' Him, 'from the least to the greatest,' when we shall realize the 'days of Heaven upon earth'—the redeemed world which has ever been the millennial hope of men, and which every prophecy, whether of Divine declaration or of men's imagination, so glowingly depicts. What a conception of laid-up goodness it is! Not in the meagre sense of a warehoused store, or a doled-out supply, but in the grander sense of a vital development, a calculated series of moral issues, a good wrought out through our own enlarging thought and maturing righteousness. That in this sense the Messiah was a laid-up goodness we are expressly told. In the progressive stages of Jewish history, and in the unconscious education of Gentile nations, God was preparing men for Christ. He is credulous, indeed, who can read the Old Testament record of the Jews, and the general history of the nations, and conclude that this marvellous development of the world is a blind concurrence of chance influences.

(2) So in the providence of *individual life.* All the perplexities of personal experience notwithstanding, may we not see purpose, plan, and goodness in each individual history? Is there not for every individual life a stored-up goodness, to be realized as we grow to a qualification for realizing it by our living and working harmony with God's great laws? Of course, if a man will be wilful, selfish, or wicked, regardless of physical, social, moral, or religious law, violating the Divine order of things, these cannot work out for him good issues. 'Can a man take fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned?' If he touch pitch he must be defiled. 'Whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him.' God Himself cannot make wrongdoing come right. Law must work out its natural issues. 'Whatsoever a man soweth, that must he also reap.' God's good laws and processes work good only to those who conform to them. He is blind, indeed, who can read no lesson of Divine purpose and goodness in his own experience of life. How often things in themselves painful, and seemingly adverse, work out the highest good! The severest experiences develop the noblest character. We 'labour to enter into rest.' 'Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.' In the genealogy of hope, tribulation is its ancestral stock. The mysteries and struggles of life have been the conditions of our largest faith, our most enduring patience, our conquering strength, our noblest sympathies, our most ineffable rest.

I am well content to wait
In the bitter storm or strait
For the rending of the curtain and unclosing of the bars;
While my vision is but weak,
And the purple of the Peak
Is the sight that I behold above the battle and its scars;
For the Peak itself lies hid
And yet adverse fates forbid,
While I grope amid the shades and feel the shock that rudely jars;
But I know the coming Dawn
If beyond is not withdrawn,
And although our little day be night, it is a night of stars.[1]

Hiding.

Ps. xxxi. 20.—'Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride (RV. 'plottings') of man: thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues.'

1. Who are 'they' of whom the Psalmist says, 'Thou shalt hide them'? Is it a favoured few, a selected and exempted remnant, whom the care of the Eternal shall insulate from the open world, and remove into the silence of the forests or the hills, to contemplate and to adore? Is 'the secret,' 'the covert,' some curtained or cloistered circle where the wicked cease from troubling, and where there is leisure to be good? Is it a home with God beyond the grave in the land far off, where the righteous enters into the peace and light of immortality? Is the promise restricted to priests and seers here, or to the just made perfect yonder? The preceding words tell us otherwise. The 'they' of this golden oracle are all those who fear Him, all those who trust in Him. The humblest spiritual loyalist to God, the weakest, the weariest, the busiest, who hides himself in Him, who commits the way to Him, who commends the spirit to Him—this hidden life, this secret of the Presence, is for him.

[1] F. W. Orde Ward.

(1) Now the Lord's hiding of a man certainly does not mean a hiding of him from any good work that needs to be done in the world. Men may hide themselves from a good cause, especially if serving it may cost something; but the Lord never hides a man in the way of moral or religious cowardice. Certainly that was never the Lord's way of hiding a man in the Old Testament. God did not hide Moses from before Pharaoh, except when he was a little child. God did not hide Elijah from all the prophets of Baal, or from Ahab, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up—and a man so stirred up is apt to be at his worst and fiercest. The Lord did not hide Amos, of the country town of Tekoa, from the peril which someone must meet of speaking plain truths to the priests of the king at Bethel. Neither did the Lord hide Hosea, or Isaiah, or any of His brave servants and true prophets from cruel mockeries, and dangers, and defeats, and new duties also growing out of defeats. The Lord hid none of them from all the glorious action, ever needing to be repeated, by means of which God worked out His purpose beyond the might of kings and the fate of empires, and the knowledge even of His prophets. God did not hide the Son of His love from the Cross. The Lord has never hidden prophets and apostles and martyrs from duty's supreme hour.

¶ It is a wonderful thing to be permitted to watch a life which you have reason to know is hid in the secret of the Presence of the Lord. Some few years ago I met a good man, humble and gentle, a missionary to Eastern Africa. He abode in the Presence. I could not but see it. I heard him tell, with the eloquence of entire simplicity, how in the tropical wilderness, in the deep night, he had waited for and shot the ranging lion which had long been the unresisted terror of a village clan. It could not be the will of God, he reasoned, that this beast should lord it over men; and so, as it were in the way of Christian business, he went forth and put it to death. And then I watched that man, a guest in my own house, under the very different test of the inconvenience of missing a train; and the secret of the Presence was as surely with him then as

when he had lain quietly down to sleep in his tent on the lonely field, to be roused only by the sound of the lion's paw as it rent the earth at the open door.[1]

(2) Again, no one of us can expect his whole life through to be hidden from suffering; the Lord has never granted such exemption to any man, and to the Christ least of all. It is a mystery to us, no doubt, this great tempest of evil in the midst of which our humanity is cradled, a storm cloud through which forlorn voices, as of lost souls, wail, and only through momentary rifts of which human eyes wet with tears seem to catch glimpses of some purer heaven and the quiet stars! We cannot measure, we cannot fathom, the limits of human suffering or the depth of wisdom that may lie beneath it all. But, anxiously as we may seek to shelter ourselves and our homes from evil, God hides no man always from the storm of the sin of the world, from the struggle in his own flesh with pain, from the wrestling in the night with some angel of sorrow, from the final darkness of death. When the Lord would make a strong man fit for manly duty here and for grander achievement in some world beyond, be sure the Lord will not hide that man in this earthly preparation of him from some necessity of toil and strife, and strain of burden, and fret of care, and trial of spirit, or keep from his life the cup of communion with Christ in his sufferings. These are they who have come out of great tribulations—such is Heaven's triumphal greeting to earth's most successful men and women.

¶ O that thou wouldst understand the great good of Tribulation! This it is which blots out sins, cleanses the soul, and produces Patience: this in Prayer inflames it, enlarges it, and causes it to exercise the most sublime act of Charity; this rejoices the Soul, brings it near to God, causes it to be called, and to enter, into Heaven. This it is which tries the true Servants of God, and renders them wise, valiant, and constant. This it is which makes God hear them with speed. . . . It is this which Annihilates, Refines, and Perfects them: and finally, it is this which of earthly, makes Heavenly Souls, and of human, Divine; transforming them, and uniting them in a wonderful way with the Lord's Humanity and Divinity.[1]

[1] H. C. G. Moule, *The Secret of the Presence*, 9.

(3) Again, it may be said that the Lord's hiding of a man is not a hiding of him from the common interests, occupations, pleasures, and customs of the world. The Son of Man came eating and drinking. Jesus was not one of that select company of Essenes who had withdrawn from the city to set up a separate community of virtue for themselves in the wilderness. His first act of ministry was at a wedding; and His benignant friendship blessed the whole feast. Indeed, if we look back into the ages before Christ, we notice that the Lord's servants were mostly city-born and city-trained and city-tried and tempted men. We do not forget, indeed, Amos or Micah, these prophets of the country people—the Lord trains men under the greatest variety of circumstances, and His truth needs many voices—but the great prophets of old grew up in the midst of affairs. Isaiah lived at court; Jeremiah came from a country town, but he did the most of his work in wicked Jerusalem. The prophets were not hidden by being snatched out of human life and left to contemplate the heavens on some lone mountain-top; they were hidden of God in some way that sheltered their hearts and gave them inward peace, even while they walked the thronged streets and saw the tumultuous passion, and were themselves pursued by the cruel evils of the crowded cities. So we must not expect to find God's hiding for our manhood or womanhood by withdrawal from temptations into some secluded nook afar from worldliness. Worldliness is ever present; we talk and laugh and work and pray in the midst of worldliness; and if there is any hiding of God from it, it is not to be found behind outward barriers or within any blissful ignorance.

2. How, then, does God hide a man? What is the pavilion in which His servant dwells

[1] Michael de Molinos.

serene? May we at times know something of the peace of the shadow of His wing?

(1) A man may be said to be hidden in God when he is spiritually conscious of the presence of God. When a man is spiritually conscious of the presence of God it secludes and separates him from every other presence. Can we understand that? You go into a room full of people, and the tumult of tongues is all about you. You are bewildered and distracted. In the ordinary language of society which sometimes hits the truth of its own condition rightly, you 'feel lost.' You lose yourself in the presence of so many people. They all seem to take hold of you, and claim some part of you, whether they speak to you or not. You are lost in the crowd. You are merely part of the tumult. But by-and-by you meet your best friend there; somebody whose life is your life; somebody whom you sincerely love and trust; somebody who thoroughly satisfies you, and, by the contact of his nature, makes your taste and brain and heart and conscience work at their very best. As you draw near to him it seems as if you drew away from all the other people. As he takes hold of you, he seems to claim you, and they let you go. The worry and vexation of the crowd sink away as he begins to talk with you, and you understand one another. By-and-by you have forgotten that all those other men are talking around you. You have escaped from the strife of tongues. You are absorbed in him. He has hidden you in the secret of his presence.

The child of God has always a refuge from the cavils and fault-findings, the ridicule and misunderstanding of his fellows. There is One who understands him, and who does not laugh at him. There is One whom, if he pleases and satisfies, the rest may go their way. Across his life may blow the most cruel winds of slander, and they cannot touch him. His Friend has hidden him in the secret of His unseen presence, and there he grows up into fearlessness and conscientiousness and peace.

When winds are raging o'er the upper ocean,
And billows wild contend with angry roar,
'Tis said, far down beneath the wild commotion,
That peaceful stillness reigneth evermore.

So to the soul that knows Thy love, O Purest!
There is a temple, sacred evermore!
And all the babble of life's angry voices
Dies in hushed stillness at its peaceful door.

Far, far away, the noise of passion dieth,
And loving thoughts rise ever peacefully,
And no rude storm, how fierce soe'er it flieth.
Disturbs that deeper rest, O Lord, in Thee.[1]

(2) There is one other manner of God's hiding of a man which the humble and the contrite spirits have known—the hiding of a man in the very holiness of God, the hiding of a forgiven soul in the very light of God's pure and infinite Presence. The Psalmist of old had learned that there is no safe hiding-place for a man but in the midst of the presence of the Holy One of Israel. 'For whither,' he said, 'shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there; if I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.' 'Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.' So cried the Psalmist of old; and it is true now as always that the only safe and everlasting hiding of a man must be in the light, in the very heart of the flame of the Eternal Holiness. It is the old prophetic truth that needs to be preached with new power to a sinful and adulterous generation—Who of us shall dwell with the everlasting flame? And the answer shall ever be

[1] Harriet Beecher Stowe.

the same—the true men, the right character, shall dwell unconsumed in the pure flame. For our God is a consuming fire.

¶ 'Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?' That question does not mean—as it is often taken to mean—What mortal can endure the punishments of a future life? but, Who can venture to be God's guests? and it is equivalent to the other interrogation, 'Who shall ascend to the hill of the Lord, or who shall stand in His holy place?' The answer is, If you go to Him for refuge, knowing your danger, feeling your impurity, *you* may walk amidst all that light softened into lambent beauty, as those Hebrew children did in the furnace of fire, being at ease there, and feeling it well with themselves, and having nothing consumed about them except the bonds that bound them.[1]

Sin and Forgiveness.

Ps. xxxii. 1, 2.—'Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.'

The Thirty-second Psalm is one which is not only declared by its title to be a 'choice song of David,' but which seems to be rightly so called. There is a large amount of agreement among those who are competent to give an opinion on the subject that this Psalm may safely be placed among those which are to be assigned to the royal Psalmist. It is the second of the seven Penitential Psalms—those Psalms which St. Augustine is said to have had written out on the wall over against his sick-bed, that he might exercise himself in them, and find comfort in them in his sickness.

If we regard it as an outpouring from the heart of the royal penitent, we shall see how beautifully it expresses what we should conceive to have been his feelings after his recovery from his great sin. The Fifty-first Psalm would seem to have been the first result of Nathan's visit to him. It contains the confession of his sin and his prayer for forgiveness. The Thirty-second Psalm tells us that the confession which was made has won the forgiveness that was implored, and expresses to us the heartfelt blessedness of a son who finds that he is not only pardoned, but welcomed back with open arms to his Father's favour and his Father's house. The Psalm appears to indicate—what harmonizes well with the history of David—that there had been an interval during which the sinner hesitated as to whether he should lay bare his heart before Jehovah and admit the whole enormity of his sins, an interval which had been a time of great misery to himself. 'While I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture was changed as with the drought of summer.' The very springs of his life seemed to be dried up. But he found out that the attempt to spare himself the shame of confession was only prolonging his own misery; it was remaining in a famished land when the plenty of his Father's house was still accessible. But at last he determined to arise and go to his Father, with a view to admitting all his guilt. 'I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.' And, as in the case of the lost son, the penitent king finds a great deal more than forgiveness. He is welcomed back to a home where he will find shelter and preservation for evermore, and his return thither is signalized by joy and music. 'Thou art my hiding-place,' says the Psalmist to the God who has forgiven him; 'Thou wilt preserve me from trouble; thou wilt compass me about with songs of deliverance.' These songs will not be allowed to die away. Whatever henceforth the penitent may do in his recovered home, Jehovah will give him cause to praise Him. Thus the joy which comes from God in forgiveness and blessing returns to Him again in thanksgiving and praise.

In these opening verses, the Psalmist's sin, that it might appear exceeding sinful, is pictured under four names:—(*a*) *transgres-*

[1] A. Maclaren, *The Wearied Christ*, 207.

sion, (b) *sin,* (c) *guilt,* (d) *guile.* Of these, *transgression* consists in acts of disobedience which therefore need pardon; *sin* is a missing of the mark, a wrong aim of life, which needs Atonement; *guilt* is that sense of sin which creates an obstacle between man and God and which therefore needs a reassurance of favour on God's part; while *guile* is an unwillingness on the sinner's part to face the facts of his own sinfulness; this last therefore needs on God's part a kind severity which shall unsparingly bring the truth home.

1. Let us consider these four words used to portray the offences of man against God and his own soul.

(1) *Transgression.*—The significance of this word is to *cross over a line.* That is what all sin does: it crosses the line of God's commandments and breaks the bounds of moral order. God has, according to the principles of eternal righteousness, set bounds to man's actions. To cross the bounds is to transgress not only the commandment but the principles of righteousness, of which the law is but a transcript. Surely to have dishonoured his faithful friend's unprotected wife, and then to have caused him to be murdered, was a fearful transgression. And yet let not anyone boast himself against David, because he has not actually committed the sins of adultery and murder; for our Lord has taught us that the sin of these things lies not only in the actual doing of them, but in the lustful thought and in the murderous hatred that lurks in the heart and is indulged in the disposition. Therefore an unclean thought indulged in is the first transgression of which David was guilty, hatred indulged in against another is the second.

(2) *Sin.*—The significance of this word is *to miss a mark.* God has not only set bounds across which we must not go, but He has set up a mark at which we must aim. Righteousness is both negative and positive. Not to do and to do are the forms under which all law is written. David in his sin had missed the mark of God's requirement in maintaining and cultivating positive righteousness of character. In this also we have come short. So says the Apostle: 'For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.'

(3) *Iniquity.*—The significance of this word is, that *which is turned out of its proper course or situation;* hence, anything that is morally distorted and perverted. This must refer to the original corruption of the nature of man, out of which proceed all evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, and such like. (Cf. Matt. xv. 18, 19). This is the real source of our sin and transgression. At the beginning man was turned out of his proper course and condition by yielding to the temptation of the devil, and hence his nature became perverted from the true and faithful worship and obedience of God. In the Fifty-first Psalm David alludes to this corruption of his nature in terms of deep and bitter sorrow; 'Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.' This is the root of the whole matter; and though God does not hold us guilty of original sin, it is nevertheless a fact to be recognized and deplored. We need not only expiation for our guilt, but regeneration from our inward corruptions.

(4) *Guile.*—The significance of this word is, *fraud and deceit.* It is the same word, in effect, as 'bait,' that which is used to allure fish, that which is placed over the point of a hook, covering up and thus deceiving the fish to its destruction. There are few men in whose character there is no guile. Certainly David had sought to deceive himself, his two victims, and God. The reproof of Nathan uncovered his soul before his own eyes, and exposed his secret and wicked intention.

2. For these four phases of sin the Psalmist finds four phases of forgiveness.

(1) First, he speaks of *the forgiveness of our transgression.* The meaning of the word forgiveness is 'to send away.' Thus God sends away from His heart and from our own our transgressions. He does not hold them against us. He bids us let them depart out of our consciousness as offences against Him. Of old the scape-goat taught this lesson to Israel. On Him was laid our transgressions,

and he bore them away into a land of forgetfulness. Many beautiful passages of Scripture are illustrative of this. Our sins are removed from us as far as the east is from the west; they are blotted out as a thick cloud; they are cast into the depths of the sea; they are cast behind God's back; they come no more into His remembrance.

(2) Second, he speaks of *our sin being covered.* Sin is odious and abominable, and must be put out of God's sight. God covered the Hebrews in Egypt with the blood of the paschal lamb, and thus protected them from the stroke of the destroying angel. God covered the ark in which the law was deposited with the mercy seat, and thus saved the people from its damning curse. So He covers our sin; hides it from His sight; not by any fiction of words, but by an actual propitiation. He gives us a protection against sin in the blood of Jesus Christ, and covers us with His righteousness as with a garment. 'Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ.' He is the only effectual covering for the sinful soul.

(3) Third, he speaks of *the non-imputation of iniquity.* That is, He does not now count to or against us the iniquity of our corruptions. He regards the believer who comes to Him as being freed from his iniquity, and does not lay it up against him. 'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.' This is also a true word, and is to be taken at its full value. The reason why God can do this is found in the fact that He has made Jesus, who knew no sin, to be sin for us.

(4) Fourth, he speaks of *the removal of guile* from the heart; this not in express terms, but by implication. For by nature there is no man in whose heart there is not guile, nor can a man unaided free himself from the deep deceitfulness of his heart. God by His spirit comes in, and so regenerates a penitent sinner that he who was full of fraud and deceit becomes guileless and honest.

One of the first conditions of forgiveness is sincerity. There must be no keeping back of any part of the sin, either in the way of refusing to lay it open before God, or of excluding it from the resolution to eschew it utterly in the future. David, it seems, had at first lacked this absolute sincerity. He had tried to persuade his conscience that the evil had not been so very great, and had abstained from confessing it before God. But the suffering, of both body and soul, with which God's heavy hand afflicted him, brought him to the right way, just as the mighty famine in the far country brought the lost son to his home. This is the message, a message both of warning and of hope, which the Psalmist has for us: 'I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way in which thou shalt go: I will counsel thee with mine eye upon thee. Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose trappings must be bit and bridle to hold them in, else they will not come near unto thee.' Stubborn impenitence is not manly, but brutish. To refuse to yield unless forcible compulsion is used is a mark, not of freedom or intelligence, but of senseless folly. Man's dignity and privilege lie in being able to give a willing obedience to the God 'whose service is perfect freedom'; and this willing obedience is doubly necessary when for a time there has been disobedience and rebellion. In our turning again to God there must be absolute sincerity and absolute submission. We must be ready to accuse ourselves in full; ready to confess all that we have done, and to suffer all that He may impose. Then we may be sure of forgiveness.

¶ Except as an element in the whole process of 'turning to God,' sorrow for sin—or even change of mind, one might add—does not amount to repentance. We do not get the chance of being sorry—we are made sorry for our sins without being consulted; but we do get the chance of returning, or refusing to return, to God. I remember a saying of Mrs. Booth's apropos of the Prodigal Son, to this effect: 'It was not repentance when he grew hungry, nor even when he said, "I will arise and go to my father"; you see repentance where it is said, "he arose and came to his father."' [1]

[1] *Letters of Principal Denney to His Family and Friends*, 17.

Guile.

Ps. xxxii. 2.—'In whose spirit there is no guile.'

This word 'guile' is a very suggestive word. It suggests the common way of dealing with a reproachful conscience. The common way is to deal with it by guile, by some stratagem of the mind. It is an almost irresistible temptation to the best of us to put up shelters for ourselves against the blinding judgment. And there are many kinds of shelters into which we creep for the security of our souls and in which we try to find a kind of unsettled peace.

1. There is, for instance, the way of self-excuse. We say to ourselves that we are not so bad as our own conscience would have us think. We take refuge in phrases about the frailty of poor human nature. We are erring creatures at the best, and God, who knows us through and through, will not demand more of us than we are capable of being, and will not judge us harshly. After all, we are all in the same boat. And on the whole, perhaps, we convince ourselves that in our gloomy self-reproach we are taking our sin too seriously.

¶ This ministry of sin's self-condonation is the most illegitimate of all priesthoods. It makes a man in his sin the condoner of his own misdoings, and when he once solaces himself in this fashion, sooner or later he loses all power to recognize moral distinctions. For evil is an artist in self-excuse, a very genius in the subtleties of perverted judgment. It does not deny the moral order of the world. It acknowledges its existence by compromising with it. Sin in its self-deceit can do homage to the noblest ethical standards. It admires them, but at a distance.[1]

2. Or we build the shelter of good works. We scan the other side of the ledger, where memory has recorded this or that good deed in our favour. Or we give ourselves to good works, determined to make up for the past by doing all the good we can. This kind of strategy is at the root of the whole system of penance wherewith men and women have tortured their lives, seeking by the pain of the body to cleanse the stain of the soul.

¶ 'In Mr. Dimmesdale's secret closet, kept under lock and key, there was a bloody scourge. Oftentimes this protestant and puritan divine had plied it on his own shoulders, laughing bitterly at himself the while, and smiting so much the more pitilessly because of the bitter laugh. It was his custom, too, to fast, not as a means of purifying his body and rendering it more fit for heavenly illumination, but rigorously as an act of penance.' So Hawthorne describes his penitent putting up his shelter of self-inflicted pain against reality. But it was all the strategy of guile, seeking a peace through evasion of the light.

3. There is another kind of shelter, too, in which we take refuge. It is the thought of what some other has done for us, even God Himself. The most blessed truth of all knowledge is the truth that Christ died for us. Toplady's old hymn has that truth in it which is the one anchor of our hope:

> Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
> Let me hide myself in Thee.

But there is a way of stating that truth and resting in it which may be a mere evasion, a mere shelter from a sin we refuse to face. We may lift up the Cross of Christ between us and the thought of sin so as to hide us from the sting of sin's reality. One man may die for another, taking on himself *some* of the consequences of the other's sin—for the deepest consequences are within the soul of the sinner himself; but can anyone carry our responsibility for our own deeds and leave us in a moral world? The innocent may suffer for the guilty, and continually do, but are the guilty any less guilty? Can anyone who has faced his sin accept a peace of conscience in the thought that another has died for him, without so lowering moral value as to work havoc in his own soul? There is a way of looking at the sacrifice of Christ, and accepting the sacrifice of Christ, which may lessen

[1] *Life's True Values*, Selected Essays from *The Times*, i. 134.

the sense of sin and make us take a lighter view of its horror and shame; so opening the path for future sinning. Such a view may break down barriers which conscience sets up between us and the evil thing. It may close the wound without purging the poison. In Paul's words, it makes the Cross of Christ of none effect, and puts Him to an open shame.

Whatever happens, we must face the truth of sin, without shelter or evasion. We must look into the face of accusing purity without guile. There is an honourable and a dishonourable peace, and there is no peace with honour in the face of God which comes through evasion or self-excusing.[1]

Confession.

Ps. xxxii. 5.—'I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord.'

If there is one thing which is clear from Holy Scripture in regard to the forgiveness of sin, it is the necessity of confession of it. We see it alike in the Old and in the New Testament: before the Law, under the Law, in the Gospels, and in the Epistles. 'He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy' (Prov. xxviii. 13). In these words of the Hebrew sage we may sum up the teaching of the Old Testament; in these of St. John, the teaching of the New: 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness' (1 John i. 9). 'If we confess our sins'—there it is: where the condition is unsatisfied we have no right to expect the blessing.

1. *Confession reveals a consciousness of guilt.*—In the absence of this we have no confession to make. Men and women may go to church and join in the general confession with as little contrition in the heart as when singing 'Rule Britannia!' It is a custom they follow. There can be no true confession without a sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Till the sinner is convicted he is on the defensive; he holds fast his pride of life; his speech is full of false meanings and shifty explanations. He goes on 'frowardly in the way of his heart.' But if the light of Christ finds its way into the recesses of his spirit, into that region of mean and creeping things which are ever building their foul habitations in the spirits of men, then is the man brought very low, his own heart condemns him. The true colour of sin is known; it degrades him; it is seen to disobey all notions of right, all reverence for God's abiding laws. The man sees the utter wickedness of it, and by all that is good in him is moved towards confession.

That the modern man does not feel conviction of sin is no proof that he ought not to feel it! Here is a man who accepts the hospitality of a friend, and while receiving every kindness at his hands stealthily works the ruin of his home. Being a modern man he has no sense of the sin! Here is a woman who finds it so 'dull' to be faithful, so 'interesting' and 'smart' to be false and 'to have a good time'! She is modern, and must not be expected to experience any Quaker-like 'stop in the mind'—the 'halt' of God! Here is a rascally financier robbing poor, unsuspecting persons of their savings, and clever enough to escape the grip of the law of the land. He is pursuing modern methods; he cannot be expected to feel compunction. Here is a company of men, securing large profits from a commercial undertaking, but driving their employees insane by overwork and miserable remuneration. They are modern 'captains of industry'; can they be expected to suffer conviction of sin because some distressed women in their employ work for a halfpenny an hour? Here is a literary man producing such evilly suggestive novelettes as to render honest boys thieves and pure girls harlots. Can we conceive such an one wandering broken-hearted in Fleet Street, crying, 'I have betrayed innocent blood'? There will be a chance for a more healthy and noble condition of life in our country when our powerful men and women are sufficiently spiritually-minded to feel the sharp arrows of God's living word.

[1] J. Reid, *The Victory of God*, 250ff.

2. *Confession reveals the need of pardon.*—What will you do for a man whose sin is ever before him? Will you not entreat him home to be forgiven? His need is deliverance from the burden of his guilt. His punishment is greater than he can bear; his sorrow breaks his heart. 'If I don't get rid of this burden,' cried one in our own day, 'I shall die!' But the confession is not easy. A good deal of Christian education has been done on the conscience before one lays bare the dark, sin-stained heart. Do not think that true, heart-deep confession of sin was ever lightly made. It carries with it the breaking of pride, the humiliation of high looks, the casting away of self-righteousness, and the adoption of an attitude of dependence on sheer mercy.

¶ In the Academy, some years ago, was seen the Hon. John Collier's picture called 'The Confession.' A well-groomed man is sitting with his wife before the fire in the dusk; the wife is sitting back in the shadows, the firelight falls across the strong, intelligent face of the husband. The countenance is wrung with the agony of the man's soul. He is fighting for word after word of his pitiful tale; the tension is terrible; the man bleeds inwardly; the pains of hell have got hold upon him; it is now or never with him; the whole bitter story must be told though every word blister his lips. How this man must hope for her mercy! Who can tell the future of this stricken spirit if he be forgiven? Suppose she to whom he confesses his fault gives him no release, but binds his guilt upon him, driving it more deeply down into his hard-beset soul! This man, in a modern drawing-room, is just another prodigal seeking pardon. A strong man does not readily come to that. Do not say this road to forgiveness is easy-going; it is the way of crucifixion. But it is the way of cleansing and healing; it is the way to God, who is the health of the countenance and the salvation of the life. 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'

3. *Confession shows a humble desire to be different.*—There is no progress in the spiritual life without that. Confession carries repentance with it, or it becomes a useless recitation, unheard in heaven. When we say: 'We see,' and yet go on in evil, 'our sin remaineth.' David was a man after God's own heart, for he confessed and repented. Beneath his dire folly was a heart able to be touched. Had he been hardened he would have slain the prophet of the Lord. He would have hated Nathan as Ahab hated Elijah: 'Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?' David found room for repentance the way of salvation. 'I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord.' 'I will not cherish sin; I will cast it from me. I am other than my doings indicate; I abhor my cruelty and duplicity; they shall no more have dominion over me!'[1]

¶ A gentleman once asked in a Sunday School what was meant by the word repentance. A little boy raised his hand.

'Well, what is it, my lad?'

'Being sorry for your sins,' was the answer.

A little girl on the back seat raised her hand.

'Well, my girl, what do you think?' asked the gentleman.

'I think,' said the child, 'it's being sorry enough to quit.[2]

Understanding or Restraint.

Ps. xxxii. 9.—'Be ye not as the horse or as the mule, which have no understanding; whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle.'

THE Psalmist is speaking of guidance—God's guidance of our lives. There are two ways of it—the way of understanding and the way of restraint. And the point of the text is that God seeks to deal with men as reasonable creatures, and that it is against His will and against man's nature that He should use compulsion. Force is no remedy; and when God has to force a man, He is dealing with

[1] G. C. Britton.
[2] *Children's Answers* (*ed. J. H. Burn*), 254.

an intelligent creature for whom other appeals should be possible, as if he were a mere brute.

1. In calling men to Himself, *God makes appeal to their reason.*—We leave the issues of life and death in a law-court in the hands of a casual group of men, because their business there is to judge of facts; and God, by many voices, calls upon us to recognize the facts. *Prima intelligentia ut te noris peccatorem,* says Augustine; 'the beginning of intelligence is to know yourself a sinner.' We have a power of self-judgment, and our mind is possessed by some idea of what our life might be. We see the better way and follow the baser. We honour a good man, but we know that we are not good; and from time to time the mists which hide the end of things blow back, giving us an awful sense that the end of these things is death. 'The primrose path of dalliance'—the ease, the charm, the irresponsibility, and the essential tragedy of it—we know that, and yet we do not quit it. That, says God in many voices, is not a man's existence, and he who lives in such a way is losing his life. When closely searched, men have few illusions on these great matters; but they drift from year to year, and let the shadow of age come down, with nothing fixed. It is not that they have never heard, but they will not heed; and they go out, at last, blindly, knowing they have done amiss, and never having sought for friendship with the King of that country whither they are going. It is unintelligent, it is irrational; and Jesus Christ, the Lord of wisdom, makes appeal to our sense of the facts.

We strive against Thee with our idle strength,
As in an open cage a foolish dove,
Until we find our liberty at length
Wthin Thy Love.

We have the crown refusing to be kings,
We grovel on the ground when ours the sky.
We feel the flutter of the angel wings
Yet will not fly;
. . . . . .
And every little pang or prick of thorn,
As well as earthquake shocks that shake the globe,
Teach us there is no rest for hearts forlorn
Except Thy robe;

And suffering is the shadow of its fall
That fain would gather us into its reach,
And grief is just a gracious Father's call
Who wants us each.[1]

2. *He appeals to men by experience.*—Though in a mysterious way there is a treasuring of experience even among brutes, yet it remains that one mark of difference between the higher and the lower intelligence is in the value which each attaches to experience. For the lower there is no past and no future, nothing but a present which is inhabited by a clamorous desire; but God looks for it in men that they should have some reverent sense of the past.

We are not the first in this strange island of existence; men have been here before us who have tried its resources and explored its mysteries—wise men in whose presence we bow, men of character and of chivalry to whom we listen with respect; and they tell us what the world contains—its enchantments, its delusions, its satisfactions. No doubt, for every man the world is new, and each has his own experience to make; and yet a youth is curiously settled in unreason who will not listen to the chorus of testimony from the past, but goes where he knows there is danger, and refuses what the wise and good have marked as the best of all. There is bound to be an element of venture in faith; for when Jesus calls a man He never tells him where He will lead him. To take Him as Master, believing that we, earth-bound and unstable, are yet fit for the loftiest tasks—that imposes a strain from which we shrink. But He speaks in the witness of the good and brave who, in their time, have made that venture, and who tell of the welcome they have found. They too were full of fears, iron and clay as we are, impulsive and short-sighted,

[1] F. W. Orde Ward, *Selected Poems*, 52.

living in bursts and then subsiding, in no way saints by nature. And they tell of their Master and ours, of His understanding, His long-suffering, His healing trust, how He does not break the bruised reed, or quench the smouldering wick. Though gusts of passion quenched their light and left them as a scandal to their fellows, He did not reproach. When they were too weak to think of Him, He thought of them; when their minds were crowded by secular affairs, their place remained in His great heart. We never met a Christian man whose word we could trust who has not spoken in this way of his Master; it is an unbroken witness from every land and nation and condition. It surely belongs to our intelligence that we should learn from the witness of those who have made the venture.

¶ In the main street of Chamonix, under the very shadow of Mont Blanc, stands a monument commemorative of the first ascent of the mountain in 1787. The figure of the Genevan naturalist, De Saussure, is standing erect, looking up at the mountain itself; and one look at his face tells what is in his heart. Beside him, bent over with eagerness, one hand pointing the way up, is the guide Jacques Balmat, who in the previous year had made his way to the summit. One who tarries a little beneath the monument can almost hear the guide saying to the naturalist, gripped as the latter plainly is by the grandeur and the challenge of the monarch of the Alps: 'Come. I've been up there. I know the way. Follow me.' [1]

March on, my soul, nor like a laggard stay!
March swiftly on. Yet err not from the way
Where all the nobly wise of old have trod—
The path of Faith made by the Sons of God.

Follow the marks that they have set beside
The narrow, cloud-swept track, to be thy guide:
Follow, and honour what the past has gained,
And forward still, that more may be attained.[2]

[1] C. W. Gilkey.
[2] H. Van Dyke.

3. *He draws men by their affections.*—He kindles in them some sense of gratitude, and then, before they know it or have planned to do it, they look up into His face. 'The goodness of God,' says Paul, 'leads to repentance.' How, apart from this, can we explain the way in which so many wisely reared boys and girls come to know God? They have always lived in an atmosphere of trust and kindness, and those whom they most honour honour God the most, bringing to Him the joys and cares of every day. Their knowledge of God is of such a kind that their minds are prepared to think well of Him; for anything, and especially any good thing, may be looked for from One so bountiful and so strong. They grow up before Him in the teaching and example so well given that they are already friends of God, and need not that He should utter all His truth to them; they catch at His meaning in a hint, and know Him as their Friend.

¶ Nowhere, in his sermons, letters or books, nor in private conversations with him, have I ever discovered evidences of any intellectual crisis in Jowett's life. He escaped vicissitudes. He seems, in fact, to have passed through none of those soul-searching phases of doubt and difficulty that occur in the intellectual experiences of most men who lived through the last two decades of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. It had been his good fortune in early childhood not to be indoctrinated with any of the hard, semi-Calvinistic conceptions of God, judgment and the future which haunted the childhood of so many of his contemporaries. His religion, like Drummond's, was sunny because it was rooted and grounded in the Love of God and the redeeming Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those were his fundamentals—the rocks of his faith that were never shaken.[1]

By reason, by experience, by affection, God seeks to bring us to Himself; and, in the view of this old singer, to refuse these appeals is to resign our honour as men, and to take the lower place with those for whom the past

[1] A. Porritt, *J. H. Jowett, C.H., D.D.*, 35.

is voiceless and dead and the present is without meaning, and who must be dragged, dishonourably as by force, to look upon Him. Soon or late, with our consent or against it, there is no evading that; for every eye shall see Him, and the world, which speaks to the wise with so many voices, holds compulsion in reserve for the untaught. 'Lead me, Zeus, and I will follow,' said the old sage, 'for though I resist, I must still follow.' By constraint or by persuasion, as brute or as man? To see Him from whose face the earth and heaven flee, or to see an infinite goodwill and a heart to help? What is our ultimate choice?

Praise.

Ps. xxxiii. 1.—'Praise is comely.'

THE figure of a garment which the Psalmist uses is similar to that used by the prophet Isaiah, 'the garment of praise.' The Psalmist regards this garment as 'comely.' It is a well-fitting and attractive garb for all who profess allegiance to our Lord. And he counsels us to put the garment on. Our attire has a very direct influence upon our spirits. Dress is not a passive factor, it is a very active agent, and first of all in its reactive influence upon ourselves. Will anyone say that the brightness of the wedding attire does not minister to the happiness of the occasion? But the principle has even deeper application in respect to finer and more subtle habits. Let a man put on 'the garment of praise,' and he will be amazed how such attire will minister to the soul. But it is not only that these garments have a healthy influence upon ourselves; they also exert a wonderfully heartening ministry upon others. It is always inspiring to come into the presence of a man who is wearing 'the garment of praise.' 'Praise is comely.'

And how is this comely praise to be expressed?

1. On the harp, that is, *instrumentally.*—Instrumental music is a mighty agent in awaking and ordering and enriching the emotions, but the Psalmist insists that the playing shall be 'skilfully' done. He is not referring altogether to excellent technique, but to a higher skill than this, the skill which deliberately and inventively aims at arousing holy and reverent sentiment. 'It came to pass as David played, the evil spirit departed from Saul!' Such is the fine effect of instrumental music when skilfully played. But the hand of David was intently fixed upon a hallowed spiritual purpose, and he was resolutely seeking the expulsion of the evil spirit in the heart and life of Saul. Let us bring to our aid anything that will minister to the spirit of praise. Let us indulge more and more in this exhilarating exercise. There is nothing that will lift our souls to loftier heights.

> I climb to Thy brightness
> Up my steps of praise.

2. *With singing.*—Who can define the power over the soul of a melodious, highly trained human voice in perfect accord with the Eternal laws of harmony? The Druids accounted for the strength and uniqueness of this power by affirming that all music was a faint and broken echo of the name of God, and Holy Scripture testifies that music is the special art that God has ever consecrated to Himself. 'The foundations of the world,' we are told, were laid to the strains of choral harmony when 'the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.' Through the Age of the Patriarchs, and during the Mosaic economy, the chosen vehicle for the breathing forth of the spirit of God in man was the art of music, and when the revelation of the Christ dawned upon the world's darkness, the Divine Humanity Himself took, as it were, this consecrated art by the hand, as He found her lingering in the old Temple service, and wedded her to the praise of His Church. At one of the most affecting moments in the history of the redemption, the institution of the Sacrament, Christ and His disciples 'sang an hymn.' And from that day to this no human art has preached to the soul of man with half the power of music.

¶ Hearts have been stirred by the ideals on the canvas of a Raffaelle, or by the prayer-paintings of a Fra Angelico, but it has ever been the sublime inspiration of Music that has fairly melted into enthusiastic worship souls that have been cold and hard, and religious sensibilities that have been dulled by contact with the world. Men have been so thrilled through and through by the strains of some great Musician that they have been transported into a higher world, and have even become gentle and chastened in the disappointments and trials of life. Moreover, this ruling passion is often strong in death. During the dying hours of Chopin he constantly exclaimed: 'Play me Mozart, I can listen to no other Music now.' The biographer of Dr. Norman Macleod tells us that the evening before he died he craved intensely for Music, and was deeply moved by Beethoven's Marche Funèbre, and Mozart's Kyrie Eleison.[1]

Decision.

Ps. xxxiii. 9.—'He spake, and it was done.'

When the Psalmist says of God, 'He spake, and it was done,' he is declaring that in God the word and deed unite completely. It is impossible for them to be separated. God cannot know a truth involving a conviction that shall not flash out some action, as its consequence, to the very ends of the universe. And God cannot do a deed on the farthest confines of His eternal nature but that deed has its root down in the very depths of His nature. He never resolves but action follows. He never acts but resolution has gone before. In this truth lies the solidity, the solemnity, the wonderful beauty of the world.

In this conviction the Psalmist was by no means alone. The Greek poet, Æschylus, found similar solace amid the tragedy of the world.

[1] B. Wilberforce.

Justly His deed was done.
Unto what other one
Of all the Gods should
I for justice turn?
From Him our race did spring
Creator He, and King,
Ancient of Days, and
Wisdom He, and might—
As barque before the wind,
So, wafted by His mind,
Moves every counsel, each device aright;
Beneath no stronger hand
Holds He a weak command,
No throne doth He abase Him to adore;
Swift as a word, His deed
Acts out what stands decreed,
In counsels of His heart for evermore.

1. If we allow ourselves to ask why it is that God's works always produce deeds, why His resolutions always produce their actions, while ours so often only die away in their own echoes, and have no result to show, the answer, the deepest answer, will be in this: God's resolutions are real resolutions; or, to put it more simply, God always thoroughly means everything that He says. It is not simply the greatness of His power, for there are regions where we, too, have power and yet in them our resolutions fail; the real difference is here: God's resolutions mean the things they say, while ours have only half made up their minds.

¶ It seems to me that no thoughtful man watches the state of things to-day, without seeing continual illustrations of a very curious and important truth with regard to this matter of the will and its power of decision. That truth is this: Decision is easy in the lowest and crudest conditions of human life; and it is easy again in the highest conditions of human life; but there are middle conditions in which decision becomes difficult, and men's minds float about loose and unsettled. Just consider if that be not so. Take a child, and how quickly he decides everything. Promptly and sharply his word leaps into action. He speaks and acts. There are very few considerations in his mind. Everything

is simple to him, so simple that he can hardly conceive how it can seem otherwise to anyone. Then take the other end—the full-grown man. He too decides. With many more elements to harmonize, with many more aspects of the subject to adjust than the child had, the mature man feels the necessity of decision, and grasps, as it were, the mass of many thoughts into his hand, and compacts them into a solid resolution. But between the two, what have we?—the irresolute and vague and doubtful years of him who is neither boy nor man, the years in which the directness of childhood has been lost, and the higher directness of manhood not attained, the years when crowding thoughts of many kinds make it seem often impossible to decide on anything, the misty and uncertain years of young manhood and young womanhood.[1]

2. There is in the midst of all indecision and all doubt a constant conviction that not these, but decision and belief, are the highest condition for mankind. The highest men have come out of the mists and are living in action and faith. And what delivers a man from confusion and helplessness is really a moral need. This is most interesting and important. When a man's intellectual life has become snarled and confused, and with all his thinking he cannot decide what he ought to do, then it is that a moral necessity steps in and furnishes the point about which all this mental disturbance crystallizes into coherency and purpose.

A young man has so perplexed himself with many schemes of life that it seems impossible for him to settle upon any one thing and do it. But by and by his duty to his family, the need of making bread to put into his children's mouths, steps in, and he is compelled to fix his will on something, to strike the balance of his long debate and go to work. A man has tossed back and forth the arguments for two sorts of doctrine, all the while his heart no more holding any faith than the juggler holds the balls which he flings from hand to hand in quick succession. What finally stops his weary and unsatisfactory debating is the absolute necessity, for the regulation of his life, that he should have something to believe. It is the felt power of temptation, the absolute inability to meet sorrow with a debate instead of a faith.

3. There is one act which goes beyond and includes all other acts. It is the act in which, won by the authority and love of Jesus Christ, a man takes his whole self and gives it up to the mastery of the Lord, making himself thenceforth His disciple. It is the very hardest or the very easiest act in all the world; so hard that it seems truly impossible, or so easy that it is amazing how any man can keep from doing it. The simplest natures often find it very easy. The child learns of its Saviour's love, and to accept that Saviour, to ask Him to forgive its sins, to make His will its law, seems to the child's heart the easiest and most natural of all things. The nature of the man in penitence is the child's nature over again, and so for him, too, the trust in Him who is all-trustworthy seems not difficult. But, when the great act of dedication is not done at once, there come in all manner of complicating questions about Christ and His mercy, and they cause irresoluteness, the condition of unresolve in which such hosts of men are standing. No longer possible for such a man is the happy taking of Christ's service as if there were no thought of anything beside; no longer possible is the fresh, enthusiastic faith of the young Christian all glowing with the joy of giving his whole life to Jesus; but still there is something very rich, if he will only take it—the sober, deep, and soul-possessing joy of a man who has hesitated long, and asked many and many a question, now at last resting his soul in one great reasonable act upon a mercy which has convinced him of its mercifulness by the way in which it has waited for him through all his hesitations. When this decision comes, when the hesitation of the life gathers itself up at last, and with one total consecration gives itself to Christ, it is a moral act that does it. The intellectual elements are already there. 'How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?' says St. Paul. But this man

[1] Phillips Brooks, *Seeking Life*, 149.

has heard, year after year, of Christ. All of His work has been abundantly familiar. What is needed is not more knowledge; it is something that shall transfer the knowledge into action. It is decision.

And that, surely, is moral. It grows from moral needs. It acts by moral powers. Indeed, it corresponds exactly to the act which one of those people who were with Jesus in Palestine did when he became the Lord's disciple. He had known all about Jesus before. He had heard of Him. He had heard Him. He had discussed His claims. He had looked up the Scriptures to see how this Teacher corresponded with the old Teachers. He had watched, as interesting phenomena, other men who had come to Christ. But one day there came a great need into that Jew's household. Into the peace and composure dropped a hot and burning pain. Perhaps sickness smote him who had never known what it was to feel an ache before. Perhaps death came and stood at the door and beckoned to the dearest in the household. Perhaps something deeper than either of these things came. Perhaps the man's soul itself grew troubled. A deep dissatisfaction settled on it. Its selfishness, its worldliness, dismayed it. It cried out at its own uselessness. It was sorry for its sin.

In either case, what followed? All that had been learned before of the Saviour sprang into clearness, grew compact with force! The need took everything the man had taught before, and crowned it with decision. He who had reasoned and reasoned, talked and talked, before now 'spake, and it was done.' Do you not hear the rushing of the centurion's horses across the hills to Capernaum, to bring Jesus Christ where his servant is lying sick? Do you not see the figure of the poor woman creeping into the banquet-room in her shame and love? Do you not hear the timid knock in the darkness of Nicodemus at the Master's humble doorway? In every case the relation between the intellectual conviction and the moral act is plain. The thought and reasoning and observation have gathered the material for decision and piled it in the life, and then the spark of a need falls into the tinder and the decision blazes in an instant.

So must be the coming of man to Christ. 'Coming to Christ!' There are no words that have meant so much to human ears as those words have meant. To come to Christ is the completest act that any man can do. It is the acceptance of His forgiveness, the reliance upon His help, and the gradual growth into His character. Is not that plain? Is there anything mysterious or unintelligible about it? There is one Being, and only one Being, who can forgive us for our sins, and that is the God whom Christ manifests. There is only one Being who can make us live a new life, and that is the present, ever-living Christ, to whom we can pray, whose soul our soul can touch. There is one Image growing into which we shall be perfect. It is the Image of Christ. Now, when we ask Him to forgive us, when we ask Him to help us, and, by any culture that He will, to make us like Himself—that is coming to Christ. When we have done that, we have come to Christ. It begins when we lay hold upon the borders of His help. It is finished only when we have attained His Christliness.[1]

Those who would taste God's love, full, free, and tender,
Must be prepared for absolute surrender.
Our *perfect* love is what our Lord requires,
A love that dominates the heart's desires.
Such love alone His dictates can fulfil,
And make man consecrated to His will.

Those who entirely to their God belong,
Those only, can be wise, and pure, and strong.
Lord, help me lest, when Thou dost claim my heart,
I keep back, doubting, just one little part.
Help me, O God, to give to Thee the whole,
The infinite surrender of the soul.[2]

[1] Phillips Brooks.
[2] A. H. Lash, *Dawn, and Other Sacred Poems*, 80.

Praise Without Ceasing.

Ps. xxxiv. 1.—'I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth.'

Who said that? Surely he must have been one remarkably exempt from the troubles of life? Not so. He was one whose life was fuller of strange vicissitudes, and more loaded with trials, than that of almost any other. Great mercies he had to speak of, great deliverances, great honours, great joys; but he could also tell of great sorrows, great calamities, great reverses of fortune, great punishments for his sins. And yet, with all these full in view, he could say, 'I will bless the Lord at all times,' in my darkest as well as in my brightest hours, in my weary wanderings as well as in my peaceful home, in my sorest chastenings as well as in my purest joys; and it was not simply 'I will *acknowledge* the Lord at all times,' or 'I will *submit* to the Lord at all times.' It was far more: 'I will *bless* the Lord at all times.' In the very things that seemed fitted only to depress he found materials for a song!

1. Divine grace enables us to do what human nature unaided will never do—walk uncomplaining in the furnace which is heated seven times; sing in the inner prison, with backs bleeding from the scourge and feet fast in the stocks; live in the Spirit, though we are exiled to Patmos, and forced to toil in its marble quarries week-day and Sabbath-day. We survey and we accept God's grace manifested in Christ crucified and risen; and that free gift of a full salvation, when we grasp it, when we come back to it continually, conquers our disquiets and elicits our praises, whatever the weather be outside. We appropriate God's grace conveyed to us in the secret and individual ministry of the Holy Ghost; and when we have Him inhabiting us—Advocate, Comforter, Remembrancer of every satisfying truth, Guide to larger endowments of life and light and love—we have a spring of fresh water, gushing up through the sand among the salt waves of the sea. There is ample provision for blessing the Lord at all times.

¶ When the morning broke Job was the greatest of the men of the East; ere the evening fell he was flockless, serfless, childless, a beggar, a wreck; yet Job was

> True as the dial to the sun,
> Although it be not shined upon;

he said, 'Blessed be the name of the Lord.' One dark day David fled from Absalom, and Shimei came out and cursed him, and his little troop of loyal souls went weeping over the Mount of Olives, and God's face was hidden; but David's faith had still its quiet song, 'Here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him.' Paul lay in the Mamertine dungeon waiting to be beheaded by the lictors of Nero; and the future for Paul was ablaze with hope, and he saw the crown of righteousness, 'and stepping westward seemed to be a kind of heavenly destiny.' Mary Tudor was keeping the martyr's stake for John Bradford; but nothing damped the victory of John Bradford's trustful and restful spirit; 'If the Queen be pleased to release me,' he wrote, 'I will thank her; if she confine me, I will thank her; if she burn me, I will thank her.' Three negro boys in Uganda—their names should be kept in everlasting remembrance: Kakumba, Seruwanga, and Lugalama, the eldest not seventeen, the youngest only eleven—were sent in 1885 to the flames for their Christian faith; and from the midst of the fire their hymn came pealing, 'Daily, daily, sing to Jesus!' What has been done by so many, you and I, strengthened by our God in the inner man, can also do.[1]

2. Why are we not *always* able to do it, even though we are living by faith? Perhaps the chief reason is that we are lacking in the childlike simplicity of faith which earlier believers had. We have better knowledge than they, we have larger promises than they,

[1] A. Smellie, *Out of the Desert a Gift*, 4.

we have a clearer revelation of God's heart of love than they, and yet men of faith in the old days seem to have lived nearer to God than most of us can do. Perhaps it is because childhood is always more confiding than age, or because God was making up to them for the dimness of their light by drawing them closer to it that they might see more distinctly; but men like Abraham and Moses and David and Isaiah do seem to have been on exceedingly intimate terms with God. Think of Abraham's prayer for Sodom: was there ever such boldness? Think of Moses' communings with God: was communion ever more close? Think of Jehoshaphat's faith: was faith ever more sublime? Think of the Psalmist's joyous trust: was joy ever loftier or more intense? There are bursts of triumph in the Psalms which our most fervent Christian hymns cannot excel.

Hazlitt's half-satirical saying, 'In Jacob's days there was only a ladder between earth and heaven; but now the heavens have gone farther off, and become astronomical,' expresses the feeling that the childlike character of faith has been greatly lost since the childhood of the world passed away. We are distracted now by a thousand things unknown before: and clouds of immature science and shallow philosophy come between us and God. We must certainly get away from the 'childish' things of the past, but we need far more of the 'childlike'; and Christ's great saying about the things that are revealed only to 'babes' is a hint of how alone we can get back to the old sweetness of intercourse with a Father in heaven. It is this child-spirit which alone can show us reasons why we should 'in everything give thanks.'

A childlike heart, dear Master mine,
  Thy servant doth desire,
Wherein Thy touch can momently
  Enkindle sacred fire.

A childlike heart, yet wise with more
  Than childhood's wisdom brings,
Made wise by sorrow and awake
  To sing the songs she sings.

A childlike heart, yet gladder far
  Than any child can be;
Glad with the gladness of Thy saints,
  Whose life is hid in Thee.

A childlike heart, yet not a child's
  In living, conscious need,
In fulness of desire, and yet
  A child's in lowly deed.

A childlike heart, with trust entire,
  But deeper in its source,
Deeper than life, deeper than death,
  A spiritual force.

Dear Master mine! one prayer, the last,
  Vouchsafe this grace to me:
A childlike heart of love, made strong
  By love's necessity.[1]

Fears.

Ps. xxxiv. 4.—'I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.'

What were the Psalmist's fears? What are ours?

1. *The fear of man* is one.—Man is man's greatest enemy. When Robinson Crusoe saw the print of the human foot in the sand he began to fear with a dread he had not known when he saw only the 'spoor' of wild beasts. Hence the tremendous terror which shakes a nation to its base when the word 'War' is whispered from mouth to mouth. In ancient times, when the heart of an enemy knew no mercy to man, woman, or child, then indeed 'the fear of man' was an awful reality. But when the Church of Jesus began her victorious march from the Holy Sepulchre, this was her most noticeable characteristic—her glorious disregard for the fear of man. 'Whether it be right . . . to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye,' said the disciples. In that new spirit they went forward, singing,

[1] J. E. Livock, *Songs and Lyrics of the Inner Life*, 56.

to prison, to torture and to death, so that all the world wondered at this new antidote to fear.

Probably when the wise man said, 'The fear of man bringeth a snare,' he was thinking more of moral than of physical courage. The shame which a young fellow feels when he is called to bear witness for purity or temperance in an office whose atmosphere smells of the dunghill; the risk of dismissal which a servant may incur at the hands of a dishonest employer when he is asked to do a wrong thing and refuses; the unpopularity and hatred which a public man gets when for conscience' sake he takes up a position which pains his friends, loses him his influence, and consigns him to political extinction—the power to face situations such as these is a much higher and much rarer quality than the power to face the cannon's mouth. And yet without it no man can rise to front rank among his fellows. And the only way to it is by faith, faith in the presence of One whose approval outweighs every other advantage. The Regent Morton said of John Knox as his body was laid to rest in Parliament Square, Edinburgh, 'There lies one who never feared nor flattered flesh.' And why? Just because he feared God so much that he feared man not at all.

2. *The fear of poverty, failure, bereavement, sickness, and old age.*—This fear is often real enough. We have only to scan the faces of a crowd of men in a street to see how widespread it is. What is it that these care-lined brows and eager eyes express as they pass you by? Is it not the shadow of a following fear?

Like one that on a darksome road
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And having once turned round, walks on
And turns no more his head;
Because he knows a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread.

But though he does not turn his head, he knows it is there. Its shadow lies upon his face. Failure in business is a besetting fear in the lives of many men. As one has said, 'The man who feels its approach feels it always: to-day or yesterday, waking or asleep; and what is worse, he expects to feel it to-morrow.'

¶ A business man not long ago told me that one morning he received news that a man owing him a thousand pounds had become bankrupt. 'That night as I lay down to sleep I began to think of my bad debt and was tempted to worry. But I said to myself, 'No! worry is a sin, a sin against my heavenly Father.' I resolutely drove that fear away from my mind, fell asleep, and woke next morning refreshed for the battle.' That is how to meet your fears. 'Above all, taking the shield of faith, that ye may be able to quench all the fiery darts of the devil'—and among them the dart of fear.[1]

3. *The fear of death.*—The writer to the Hebrews speaks of those 'who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.' When we are young these words strike us as almost exaggerated. Death has little place in our thoughts. The churchyard is a place to play in, if not to eat our supper on its gravestones, like Wordsworth's famous child. But as we get older death becomes a greater and greater reality in our thoughts, until there are some from whom its shadow is seldom far away.

¶ Some are shadowed by the fear of death infinitely more than others. Samuel Johnson was one of the most conspicuous of these. Though one of the most robust and sensible of Englishmen, he had an intense fear of death. Once he got into a rage when Boswell spoke contemptuously of those who were afraid of it. Nor did it ever leave him, though old age brought many honours and in no way diminished his devoted admirers. In his last illness he thus wrote to an old friend: 'O my friend, the approach of death is very terrible. I am afraid to think on that which I know I cannot avoid. It is vain to look round for that help which cannot be had. Yet we hope and fancy that he who has lived to-day may

[1] W. M. Mackay, *Words of this Life*, 277.

live to-morrow. But let us learn to derive our hope from God. Meanwhile let us be kind to one another.'

When death is coming near,
When thy heart shrinks in fear
And thy limbs fail,
Then raise thy hands and pray
To Him who smooths thy way
Through the dark vale.

Seest thou the eastern dawn,
Hear'st thou in the red morn
The angel's song?
Oh, lift thy drooping head,
Thou who in gloom and dread
Hast lain so long.

Death comes to set thee free;
Oh, meet him cheerily
As thy true friend,
And all thy fears shall cease,
And in eternal peace
Thy penance end.[1]

Radiance.

Ps. xxxiv. 5.—'They looked unto him and were radiant' (Amer. RV).

What a splendid word the American Revised Version of the Bible gives us here in the change from 'lightened' to 'radiant.' The text that before was of doubtful significance, and could be passed without challenging attention, suddenly arrests us. To be radiant means to shine by inner light. It is the quality of the sun, and not of the moon. It marks access to inexhaustible reservoirs, perhaps, like radium, to be joined to some vast storehouse of power in Nature and in God.

Look at the face of a little child radiant with pleasure, with interest, with imagination, or what you will. It suggests fullness of life in its freshness. We remember Wordsworth's line:

Trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God who is our home.

[1] De la Motte Fouqué.

Look at the face of a youth radiant with love, hope, joy. Life has come in larger fullness. New fountains have been opened, new possibilities have come to be realized, and larger ones are at hand. Look at the face of the strong man radiant with the sense of triumph, of work accomplished, of an end attained—eloquent of new and still deeper satisfaction. Look at the face of the dying saint, radiant in a yet more beautiful sense, with the vision of eternity and the unrevealed splendours of the life which is hid with Christ in God.

Everywhere in them all we see fullness of life, powers from God all called forth, all exercised—interest, enthusiasm, delight, strength, attainment, knowledge, vision. We believe in the infinitude of life. We are prepared to accept the word of revelation that man is a son of God, that 'eternity' is 'hid in his heart,' because we see this radiance in his face. One recalls Correggio's great painting of the Nativity, 'La Notte,' in which the radiance from the countenance of the infant Jesus illumines every face of the onlookers, and repels the darkness of the stable in which all are gathered. It is a suggestion of the fullness of the life that is in man as a child of God.

1. Who are 'they'? It will be noted that in the Psalm the fifth verse is wedged in between two passages of anxiously personal experience. The man is glad indeed and victorious, yet both before and after this he is occupied with himself and his own deliverance. But the self-centred passage is suddenly broken by this word 'they,' with its undefined generality. He has for a moment escaped from himself, and is out in the open field, in the world—out among the lives and the feelings of others; and that in itself is a deliverance quite as great as any other that he can tell us of.

All lives and deeds are interesting and worth remembering, and every atom in the general crowd of mankind has its own particular dealing with God. But those the Psalmist is thinking of here must be especially the saints and heroes of Israel's early days. Most of the stories that he knew told of some dark purpose of enthusiasm or inspiration,

breaking at last into clear light, when someone understood plainly the Spirit of the Lord that had come upon him. There were the judges with their hot rough hearts, flaming out upon the world in the rage of helpfulness for an hour, and shining for ever in the light of that hour's deed. Behind them were the dimmer forms of patriarchs who through the dawn of history walked towards this sunrise of God's revelation with patient upturned faces. And this is the record of them all, that they looked to Him and caught His light.

2. How did they act so that their faces were radiant?

(1) *They turned away from everything that hindered.*—Open their story anywhere. It is always the same. Abraham left his home and his country and travelled far as a stranger, not knowing whither he went, because he was willing to give up everything that he might obey God and find Him. Joseph, the captive, a slave and a stranger, gives up the position and turns from the temptations that would have brought him the pleasures and the triumphs which beguile other men, in order that he might be faithful to God. Moses, forsaking the pleasures of Egypt, retiring alone on the mountain, offering his life in sacrifice for his people that God may be honoured, comes again to them with the shining face, which is ever after remembered as needing a veil that men might look upon him without distress. Daniel, in his chamber with his windows opened towards Jerusalem, and face upturned to his protecting God, shines through the centuries with a radiance which has lost nothing of its glorious strength. Paul, in his blindness, turned from the life which was challenging his young strength that he might give himself to the service of the unseen Christ who spoke to him on the way. John, the son of thunder, with softened countenance and gentle eyes, filled with the love of his Master, now the Beloved Disciple, was the first to realize in its fullness the satisfying blessedness of that intimacy with Christ which was to be the comfort and the peace of countless souls in coming ages.

(2) *They really sought God.*—It was not knowledge, or success, or pleasure, or even happiness that had led them to their choice. Moses, perhaps, is the best type as he goes alone up Mount Sinai. Now, every man has his own Sinai. The world presses hard, with business and pleasure and striving for success, and one by one, when the hour comes, we are all summoned to choose between these things and God. With us, as with Moses, the treasures of Egypt are to be left behind. We are not only to forsake them, but deliberately and carefully to seek another treasure more real, more satisfying, but less easily apprehended. God is to be sought in self-denial and in self-discipline, in sacrificial service, and in the set purpose of attainment, cost what it may. As our Lord put it, we are to forsake all and follow Him if we are to be disciples indeed. Only when that search is undertaken with sincerity, and when the heart has gathered up all its strength with Divine help to devote itself to God, does the radiance appear in the face, which is the witness at once of the realized attainment and of the satisfying joy. When Moses came down from the mountain and his face shone, men knew that he had looked upon God. He had found Him whom his soul sought, and in that finding had come the vision which filled his heart with a light which henceforth would never fail in his eyes.

(3) *And they were men of prayer.*—How frequently in the story of Jesus do we read that He turned aside in the desert or on the mountain that He might pray. That prayer was not the ordinary supplication of men who are merely seeking relief from present burden or the gratification of some pressing desire. It was not the confession in which the burdened soul pours itself out in prayer for forgiveness, nor the spiritless petition of the heart that is troubled with the cares of life or dulled with the satiety of its pleasures. It was the eager and buoyant up-springing of the soul which knows where to find God and turns to Him in the assurance of His presence and of the vision of His satisfying love. That vision reached its completeness on the Mount

of Transfiguration, and the radiance that there shone from His face seemed to the amazed onlookers to change the very nature of His body and to transform His common garments into robes of unearthly texture and celestial beauty.

¶ The same vision that Moses saw as he talked with Jehovah, the same vision that Jesus saw on the mountain of transfiguration, the vision that made their faces shine as the sun, will have power to make our lives all luminous and radiant, too. As a matter of fact, the vision is doing this still. You know that during the Boxer troubles in China it was said that the Chinese Christians could not have escaped even if they had tried, because their faces betrayed them. There was a light in their eyes which their heathen neighbours recognized as characteristic of the followers of Jesus Christ. They had looked unto Him, and their lives were lightened by that look. A little while ago Mrs. Edward Hume, from Bombay, showed me photographs of her work in India. Among the pictures which she laid down were two that were conspicuous because of the great contrast between them. The first of them was a photograph of thirty women, all of them dressed in dark garments, and in the middle of the forehead of each one was a little ash dot, showing that each one was attached still to the old idolatrous life. There was no need of that mark to tell you that about them. The low brows, the unintelligent eyes, the very aspect of dejection and hopelessness that lay across those lives told the story without any sign upon their foreheads. They had never looked unto Him Who is able to throw radiance into the life. The other photograph was a photograph of the same number of women, all of them dressed in white. There were no ash spots on their foreheads. Nor was the absence of them necessary to tell you that the light had touched those lives. They were thirty girls that Mrs. Hume had long had under her care. The influence of her life had played on the lives of those girls. They had passed with her through all the torture of famine days in India. They had nursed the orphans when it was almost nauseating to do it. The refining influence of unselfishness and sympathy was stamped upon each life. A light shone in it. They had looked unto Christ and their faces were radiant.[1]

The Angel of the Lord.

Ps. xxxiv. 7.—'The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.'

The devotional spirit of this beautiful Psalm is of such a kind as to render it precious even to the most exalted religious experience. It is a remarkable thing that while the statements of religious belief should change so drastically from age to age, in accordance with the varying mental dialect of one generation as compared with another, the language of devotional feeling should change so little. The words of this Psalmist who wrote long before Christianity began are felt to be quite appropriate to-day as the expression of the ripest Christian experience. What this ancient singer felt concerning his personal relationship to God is precisely what the Christian saint feels now. The Psalm is not so much a composition upon a central theme as a collection of aphorisms, every one complete in itself. Of these perhaps the most striking is our text, because of the peculiar nature of the figure employed in it. Nothing that goes before leads up to it, and nothing that follows recalls it; it is just an isolated saying. What can it mean? 'The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.' What a singular expression! It seems to call up the associations of a field of battle; but then surely an angel is not an army. What are we to understand by 'the angel of the Lord'? And what is the significance of this encamping round about the child of God?

1. It is generally supposed that 'the angel of the Lord' here is to be taken collectively, and that the meaning is, the 'bright-harnessed' hosts of these Divine messengers are as an

[1] R. E. Speer, *The Master of the Heart*, 115.

army of protectors round them who fear God. But there is no reason for departing from the simpler and certainly grander meaning which results from taking the word in its proper force of a singular. True, Scripture does speak of the legions of ministering spirits, who in their chariots of fire were once seen by suddenly opened eyes 'round about' a prophet in peril, and are ever ministering to the heirs of salvation. But Scripture also speaks of One who is in an eminent sense 'the Angel of the Lord'; in whom, as in none other, God sets His 'Name'; whose form, dimly seen, towers above even the ranks of the angels that 'excel in strength,' whose offices and attributes blend in mysterious fashion with those of God Himself.

There is something very touching in the first recorded message of 'the angel of the Lord,' and to our ears it may sound strange. When Hagar fled from the face of Sarai, the angel of the Lord found her in the wilderness and said, 'Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands.' Patience and self-control—such are the earliest precepts which the messenger of heaven brings to a suffering woman; but with them is combined a blessing, for he said: 'I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude.' From this beginning the record of Divine providence flows on with even current through the age of the Patriarchs. In the convulsions of the physical world, in the trials of personal faith, in the anxieties of domestic life, in the bitterness of family dissension, in the loneliness of bereavement and in the loneliness of death, the presence of God's angel, recognized or remembered, brings deliverance or strength.

Let us recall some of the places in which 'the angel of the Lord' appeared, in order to appreciate more fully the grandeur of this protection. At the supreme moment when Abraham 'took the knife to slay his son,' the voice that 'called to him out of heaven' was 'the voice of the angel of the Lord.' He assumes the power of reversing a Divine command. He says, 'Thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from *me*,' and then pronounces a blessing, in the utterance of which one cannot distinguish His voice from the voice of Jehovah. In like manner it is the Angel of the Lord that speaks to Jacob, and says, 'I am the God of Bethel.' The dying Patriarch invokes in the same breath 'the God which fed me all my life long,' 'the Angel which redeemed me from all evil,' to bless the boys that stand before him, their wondering eyes gazing in awe on his blind face. It was that Angel's glory that appeared to the outcast, flaming in the bush that burned unconsumed. It was He who stood before the warrior leader of Israel, sword in hand, and proclaimed Himself to be the Captain of the Lord's host, the Leader of the armies of heaven, and the true Leader of the armies of Israel; and His commands to Joshua, His lieutenant, are the commands of 'the Lord.' And, to pass over other instances, Isaiah correctly sums up the spirit of the whole earlier history in words which go far to lift the conception of this Angel of the Lord out of the region of created beings—'In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them.'

2. Whatever view we adopt of the significance of the first part of the text, the force and beauty of the metaphor in the second remain the same. If this Psalm was indeed the work of the fugitive in his rocky hold at Adullam, as the title tells us, how appropriate the thought becomes that his little encampment had such a guard. It reminds one of the incident in Jacob's life when his timid and pacific nature was trembling at the prospect of meeting Esau, and when, as he travelled along, encumbered with his pastoral wealth, and scantily provided with means of defence, the angels of God met him, and he named the place Mahanaim, that is, two camps—his own feeble company, mostly made up of women and children, and that heavenly host that hovered above them. David's faith sees the same defence encircling his weakness, and though sense saw no protection for him and his men but their own strong arms and their mountain fastness, his opened eyes be-

held the mountain full of the chariots of fire, and the flashing of armour and light in the darkness of his cave.

The vision of the Divine presence ever takes the form which our circumstances most require. David's need then was safety and protection; therefore he saw the Encamping Angel. To Isaiah, in the year that the throne of Judah was emptied by the death of the earthly king, was given the vision of the Lord sitting on a throne, the King Eternal and Immortal. So to us all His grace shapes its expression according to our wants, and the same gift is Protean in its power of transformation. To one man it is wisdom, to another strength, to the solitary companionship, to the sorrowful consolation, to the glad sobering, to the thinker truth, to the worker practical force—to each his heart's desire, if the heart's delight be God. So manifold are the aspects of God's infinite sufficiency that every soul, in every possible variety of circumstance, will find there just what will suit it. That armour fits every man who puts it on. That deep fountain is like some of those fabled springs which gave forth whatsoever precious draught any thirsty lip asked. He takes the shape that our circumstances most need.

¶ Take two examples of help which seems supernatural, such as we find in the biography of Sadhu Sundar Singh.

At one time he was told of some people who wished to hear the message of Jesus Christ, and he set out to find their village. He followed the directions that had been given to him, but came to no village. At first the country was a marshy jungle; and then the undergrowth grew denser, and finally Sundar realised that he was lost in the jungle. He came to a stream. That brought a ray of hope. By crossing it he might find a way out. He stepped into the water, only to discover that the current was much too strong for it to be safe for him to cross. What could he do? Darkness was coming on. Already he could hear signs of life in the depth of the dread forest. Before long all the night prowlers of the jungle would be out, seeking their prey. What chance of escape had a man alone and unarmed? Sundar prayed earnestly.

Then, before long, he saw across the river, in the now dim light, a man. The man called to him, 'I am coming to your help,' and plunging into the stream he swam across to Sundar. Telling the Sadhu to get on his back, the stranger swam with him to the other side. There they came to a cheery fire burning brightly, and Sundar was able to dry his wet clothes. What was his amazement when, while he was busy, his strange friend suddenly disappeared, and the Sadhu was left to wonder once more over the love and care of his God.

Yet another time did God send miraculous help to the man who had dared to be obedient to the heavenly vision. The Sadhu was preaching at a place called Kamyan, and again no one seemed to want him. Not one person would give him so much as a bite of bread, and when night came, he was weary with hunger and disappointment. There was no shelter to be had, and neither berries nor wild fruit to gather. He lay down under a tree and fell asleep. In the middle of the night he was roused by a touch, and looking up he saw two men standing over him. Telling him to eat, they showed him food and water. Thinking they were two villagers who were sorry for him, and had come out to make amends for their refusal to give him food during the day, Sundar got up, and thankfully ate and drank. When he had satisfied his hunger, he turned to talk to the two strangers. They had disappeared absolutely, completely.[1]

¶ Take an illustration of another nature, from the experience of Mr. Gladstone.

'I cannot help here recording that this matter of speaking is really my strongest religious exercise. On all occasions, and today especially, was forced upon me the humiliating sense of my inability to exercise my

[1] E. Sanders and E. Judah, *Sundar Singh*, 76.

reason in the face of the H. of C., and of the necessity of my utterly failing, unless God gave me the strength and language. It was after all a poor performance, but would have been poorer had He never been in my thoughts as a present and powerful aid.'[1]

Taste and See.

Ps. xxxiv. 8.—'O taste and see that the Lord is good, blessed is the man that trusteth in him.'

This confident and jubilant appeal, says Dr. Jowett, comes at the end of a series of splendid testimonies such as might be heard at many a fervent experience meeting. One man confesses that he had once been enmeshed in multitudinous fears which had crippled his walk towards Zion: 'I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears!' A group of cheery witnesses testified that in past days their faces had been clouded with sorrow, because the sunshine had gone out of their souls: 'They looked unto him, and were lightened.' One man confessed that he had been in many a tight place, closely beset by powerful temptations: 'This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.' And then it seems as though the individual testimonies merge into one strain of triumphant assurance—'The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him.' Then, out of these testimonies, and as their consequence, there issues a mighty appeal, 'O taste and see that the Lord is good.' Do not trust to hearsay! Do not be contented with the testimonies of others, with merely theoretical knowledge! Become experimental, and judge for yourselves! 'Taste and see!'

1. But can everybody's palate be trusted to give an accurate judgment? We know that there are serious differences in the powers of discernment in the material palates of men. 'One man's meat is another man's poison.' One man appreciates a flavour which to another is repugnant. One palate can discern an exquisite flavour where another discovers nothing but insipidity. There are wide ranges of obtuseness and refinement in the material palate. And may the differences not be equally manifest in the moral and spiritual spheres? Jonathan Edwards describes the moral sense by the figure of a palate, and he regarded it as a faculty by which we are to appreciate the differences between the evil and the good. But can a palate always be trusted? A neglected power becomes atrophied. Darwin confessed that in the course of years he lost his musical susceptibility; that is to say, his musical palate had become obtuse; it was no longer to be trusted. It is equally true that an abused power becomes demoralized. In art the palate is impaired by holding communion with bad work. Ruskin is for ever emphasizing the peril of holding communion with bad artistic work. Such communion vitiates the æsthetic conceptions, and their power of fine discernment is impaired. The principle holds true of literature. If we want to keep a delicate literary palate we must maintain our fellowship with the rarest literary products. Dr. Dale ministered to the refinement of his own literary sense by daily communion with Edmund Burke. If, however, we leave the masterpieces, and take up our abode with the unrefined and commonplace, our very power will lose something of its fine perception, and may eventually cease to register any dependable judgment. It seems perfectly clear that in all these regions a palate can be desensitized and defiled.

2. Is it otherwise with the religious palate? Take what we call the moral sense. Surely our experience justifies the assertion that this particular power can be so neglected and abused by evil communion that its judgments are rendered perfectly untrue. The Bible declares that some men's moral perceptions are so perverted that they call good evil, and evil good. Sweet they call bitter, and bitter they call sweet. They declare that 'revenge is sweet,' and the mood of forgiveness is stale and flavourless. And surely we may say that even in higher regions still, in the distinctively

[1] J. Morley, *Life of Gladstone*, i. 125.

spiritual, our powers can be so used that we cease to readily apprehend and appreciate God. It is possible for men to 'refuse to have God in their thought,' and the consequence is that by their own refusal they are 'given up' to a 'reprobate mind,' which may at length leave them in an insensible mood which can only be described as 'past feeling.' Can we assume, even for a moment, that the spiritual palate of Judas was as finely perceptive as that of John? Would not John be continually experiencing fine flavours in fellowship with his Lord which would offer no delicacies to the disciple who betrayed Him? 'The feast of fat things' has nothing palatable for men of this type, nothing toothsome, nothing that fosters the appetite to which it appeals. How, then, can we say to these people, 'Taste and see that the Lord is good'? What would be the value of their judgment? Can their palate be depended upon? They may taste, and then turn away in sheer indifference.

3. Now a man knows perfectly well when he is destitute of taste for these things. But has he any desire to be different? The appeal of the text is to men and women who have no taste for the highest, but who desire to acquire it. Bring your neglected or perverted palate, and see what can be done with it! And what can be done with it? Reverse the order of the text; for the key of our difficulty is to be found in the second clause, 'Blessed is the man that trusteth in him.' Now, a man can begin with trust in God who has yet no taste for the things of God. What is trust? It is not mental assent to a big creed. It is self-committal to a Person for His guidance and absolute control. It is the submission of all the choices of life to the arbitrament of God. It is detachment from mere prudence, from petty policy, from the tyranny of money, and success, and fame, and ease. It is the acceptance of the tyranny of Jesus; it is the surrender to perfect bond-service for the sake of perfect freedom. Now the text affirms that the assured result of such trust is a condition of blessedness, 'Blessed is the man that trusteth in him.' In what does this blessedness consist? When we surrender the life to God, the wondrous energies of the Spirit commence the blessed ministry of re-creation, the renewal of tone, and faculty, and function. And in this restoration there is involved the cleansing and refinement of the palate. When we are sickly and diseased we have a distaste for the good, but when the sickliness begins to pass the natural appetite is restored and good food becomes toothsome. Now this is what the Lord accomplishes for those who put their trust in Him. He makes new men of them! We become new men and new women in Christ Jesus, and in that transfigured spiritual life is to be found our eternal blessedness.

¶ Religion is not a Divine science but a Divine life. The Gospel of Christ cannot possibly be understood and appreciated except in terms of experience. It is like the ancient Greek mysteries of Eleusis, whose secrets were hidden from profane persons outside the gates. You had to become a neophyte yourself and submit to the training and preparation and then cross the threshold of the shrine before you could guess the privileges of the initiates within. Even so, to master the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven you must stoop to enter it as a little child. For God hides His secrets from the wise and prudent and reveals them unto babes.

In religion, an ounce of personal experience is worth a ton of borrowed theology. As an old writer says: 'God is best discerned by a spiritual touch. We must see with our own eyes and hear with our own ears, and our own hands must handle the word of life. For the soul has its senses as well as the body. And therefore the Psalmist, when he would teach us how to know the Divine goodness, calls not for speculation but for sensation, saying not 'O argue and understand!' but 'O taste and see how gracious the Lord is!'[1]

[1] T. H. Darlow, *At Home in the Bible*, 61.

The Face of God.

Ps. xxxiv. 16.—'The face of the Lord is against them that do evil.'

If there is one thing which we are in danger of losing in these days of advanced civilization, as compared with the ideas of more simple and primitive times, it is this vision of 'the face of God.' We have greater thoughts, no doubt, about His name, His nature, His purposes, His methods. But His countenance, flashing with intelligence, clouding with sorrow, beaming with love, as it looks out on us through Creation, seems to escape us. Less cultured peoples seem to discern a presence, to hear a voice, to feel a touch of some living being in all the play and movement of Creation. To us it is but the manifestation of vital force, the constant, pitiless swing of the wheels of a vast vital mechanism.

But to those who believe in God the face of God is not veiled. It looks out on them still through its organs of expression in Nature and in man. And it is still against them that do evil.

1. The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, *in Nature.* There is something in the broad, clear daylight, the gay frank beauty and joy of all living things, from which evil-doers naturally shrink. Bold sinners have been known to rage against it and to curse it; there is nothing which they hate so bitterly as the broad face of the sun. For such, too, as they plunge deeper and deeper into the sloughs and fogs of evil, a veil seems to fall over the glory of Creation. The splendour departs—a dull, sad shadow settles over the world. The evil-doer loses all sense of a living presence in Nature. Life gets drained of its interest, the world of its beauty, the future of its hope.

2. The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, *in the moral instincts, the moral judgments, of their fellows.* A man walks about burdened with a great, guilty secret. What is it that makes him feel as if every man whom he meets were acquainted with it, and were trying to shame him? What is it that makes him afraid to look straight into a child's clear countenance? What is it that finds allusions to his secret in the most chance expressions, and that leads him always to play about the edge of it, and half reveal it, as if everyone were thinking of it as well as himself? What but the face of God looking out on him through the face of man? God, who does know it all, who is thinking about it all, who has His eye upon it all, and is passing judgment on it all, through every eye he looks upon and every face he meets.

¶ Breadalbane [planner of the massacre of Glencoe], hardened as he was, felt the stings of conscience, or the dread of retribution. He did his best to assume an air of unconcern. He made his appearance in the most fashionable coffee-house at Edinburgh and talked loudly and self-complacently about the important service in which he had been engaged in the mountains. Some of his soldiers, however, who observed him closely, whispered that all this bravery was put on. He was not the man that he had been before that night. The form of his countenance was changed. In all places, at all hours, whether he waked or slept, Glencoe was ever before him.[1]

3. The face of the Lord looks out against them that do evil, *through the gathering glooms of death.* A man hardened in sin may walk at ease through all the pathways of the world, crying, Where is the Lord? in impious defiance or presumptuous scorn. But to every man in death the face reappears. Men who have been recovered from apparent death, and have gone through all the experience of dying, tell strange tales of how in one burning moment the buried past reappeared. The whole scroll of life unrolled, clear and orderly, before them; every thought, passion, incident, experience, standing out with startling vividness before the mind's eye, and all in the clear daylight. No mist or confusion upon them; all risen again before the face of God. And that

[1] *The Dweller in the Innermost*, 23.

vision is for ever. No more self-delusion, no more half-lights, no more refraction and distortion in the vaporous, moral atmosphere of this world. The face of God flashes out over the life as the soul passes to meet the realities of its destiny. The 'vain show' vanishes; the illusion is for ever ended. Death places a man for ever consciously before the face of God.

A death-bed's a detector of the heart:
Truth is deposited with man's last hour,
An honest hour and faithful to her trust;
Men may live fools, but fools they cannot die.[1]

The Broken Heart.

Ps. xxxiv. 18.—'The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.'

This beautiful Psalm tells us in the tenderest terms that it is always well with those who put their trust in God, that He will not suffer them to be overwhelmed, that His grace and favour are ever toward them. But it is the righteous of whom these words are spoken, the righteous to whom deliverance is guaranteed. 'The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry. . . . The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. . . . Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all.' Always the righteous, the righteous. What about the poor sinner who wants to be righteous, but knows he is nothing of the kind? Is there no refuge or consolation for him? What a large number there must be who come under that category! They want God, they want peace; they want spiritual strength and healing; but their heart sinks even when listening to such gracious and compassionate language as this, because of their misgiving that it does not and cannot apply to them. They know only too well what their struggles and temptations are, and how sorely they have been worsted in the conflict with evil over and over again. If God's solicitude is only for the righteous, there is little for them to lay hold of in His covenant of grace.

'The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.' No question of righteousness here, no thought of merit or reward, but only of a great need and an efficacious remedy for it! Perhaps we ought to say no righteousness of record but only a righteousness of heart. And that makes all the difference. If we get right with God, right in spirit and desire, right in attitude and aim, He will take care of the record. This is the righteousness He wants—this rightness of the inner man, this humbling of ourselves before Him, this opening of our souls to the inflow of His redeeming love. *His* righteousness will do the rest, remake us in its own likeness, build and fashion us anew to His glory.

1. 'The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart.' This means more than a state of repentance. Understand the phrase 'a broken heart' in the literal sense in which we usually employ the words. The whole tenor of the rest of the Psalm bears it out. It is people in trouble who are thus spoken of, people shattered and helpless under the shock of calamity and dismay. It is because they have suffered so much that they are called broken in heart. No doubt the broken heart as thus construed includes a surrendered will. And so it ought to do; there is a close connection between the two states. When we are brought low, conscience begins to work, and we are prepared to listen to salutary truth that in an ordinary way finds us impervious. Trouble takes us in one of two ways; it either hardens us, makes us bitter and rebellious, or it opens our eyes and quickens our sensibilities, destroys our delusions, brings down our self-conceit, and renders us altogether more accessible to the simple verities of life. A soul that has suffered much and not been spoiled thereby usually acquires an unearthly quality, a susceptibility to supersensuous

[1] E. Young.

values which it did not possess before, and which nothing but acquaintance with pain can give it.

¶ A broken heart is a sponge for God's Word.[1]

2. A broken heart leads to an entire change of spirit and outlook on the world. As a rule, while a man is prosperous and powerful it is hard to get near him. He is accustomed to confer benefits, not to receive them; to be treated with deference and consideration; to expect plenty of recognition and applause. Soul-intimacy does not flourish in such an atmosphere as that, for the simple reason that self-knowledge in the best sense does not either. Now, have you ever come across a man who has been so changed by suffering that you found you could get at him in a way utterly impossible before that experience? He has been down into the valley of humiliation, has met and battled with Apollyon there, and then come sore and wounded into the valley of the shadow of death. He is a different being now, more so than he himself discerns. It is not that he is morally a better man; he is governed by a different spirit, that is all. The scales have fallen from his eyes; he has been flung back upon realities, and delivered from the dominion of delusions. He has found out how much the world's admiration is worth and how little it has to do with contentment of heart. It is a curious thing, this psychological readjustment; but we all know it. We know that we can get near to the soul that has been softened by sorrow as we seldom or never can get near to that which has not. It is a noteworthy fact that our language has no words to express what we may call sympathy with joy. There is no such word; we only draw near each other in the deepest sense through the gateway of pain. Surely this is what it means to say, 'The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.' The two go together, the broken heart and the contrite spirit, the suffering and the receptive soul. God can reveal Himself, communicate Himself, in a specially gracious fashion and degree to the heart that has been through the fire of affliction.

Thou hast visited me with Thy storms,
And the vials of Thy sore displeasure
Thou hast poured on my head, like a bitter draught
Poured forth without stint or measure;
Thou hast bruised me as flax is bruised;
Made me clay in the potter's wheel;
Thou hast hardened Thy face like steel,
And cast down my soul to the ground;
Burnt my life in the furnace of fire, like dross,
And left in prison where souls are bound:
Yet my gain is more than my loss.

. . . . . .

What if Thou hadst set my feet
With the rich in a gilded room;
And made me to sit where the scorners sit,
Scoffing at death and doom!
What if I had hardened my heart
With dark counsels line upon line;
And blunted my soul with meat and wine,
Till my ears had grown deaf to the bitter cry
Of the halt and the weak and the impotent;
Nor hearkened, lapt in a dull content,
To the groanings of those who die!
My being had waked dull and dead
With the lusts of a gross desire;
But now Thou hast purged me throughly, and burnt
My shame with a living fire.
So burn me, and purge my will
Till no vestige of self remain,
And I stand out white without spot or stain.[1]

[1] R. W. Barbour, *Thoughts*, 79.

The Quiet in the Land.

Ps. xxxv. 20.—'They devise deceitful matters (RV 'words') against them that are quiet in the land.'

Here is a most beautiful name, 'the quiet in the land.' It is the name appropriated to himself by the Psalmist as he moves warily amid open opposition and whispering intrigue.

[1] Sir Lewis Morris.

It is, further, the name wherewith he designates all who range themselves with him to fear and serve the Lord in sincerity and truth. No doubt the beauty of this title was lost on a wide circle of men in whose hearts there surged the fierce passions of war. Many there would be eager to achieve a prouder title through bloodshed and treachery. To such this soft-sounding phrase would be an unworthy name, a name to be repeated in the contemptuous tones of mockery. It can never be so spoken by us who know Christ. For in Him we are called to a life of 'all lowliness and meekness,' to a life of love that 'worketh no ill to his neighbour,' to a life calm and peaceful by reason of unflinching trust in the Father. This is the ideal life set before us; and it may be well for us to remember how very much the upward trend of human life owes to quiet lives modelled on this Christian ideal.

The healing of the world
Is in its nameless saints. Each separate star
Seems nothing, but a myriad scattered stars
Break up the night and make it beautiful.

1. Now, 'the quiet of the land' are the quiet in heart. We cannot live in quiet unless there be a stillness, an unruffled peace, in our hearts. Nothing outside and apart from us can ever soothe us into calm if the heart itself be full of trouble and unrest. Even Nature, when she presents us a smiling world of sunshine and beauty, cannot be trusted to supply us with what we may lack, that peaceful happiness which has 'its seat and centre in the breast.' The secret of all quiet is the quiet heart. This was emphasized by the Master when He declared of those temptations that wreck our inward peace, 'All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.' And He further impressed upon us the necessity of first cleansing the house of the heart before the things that belong unto our peace could ever be invited to enter in and dwell with us. The first essential of the quiet and peaceable life, unassailable from without, is therefore a very house of quiet within us. Our hearts must be quiet if we are to be 'the quiet in the land.'

2. 'The quiet in the land' are the quiet in and through religion. Amid the troubled waters of our human life the voice most potent to bring us safety and rest is the voice of religion. It has always been so. The Gospels contain the names of many who are mentioned but rarely in connection with Christ—Simeon, the aged saint, who blessed God for Him; Anna, the prophetess, who likewise gave thanks for Him; Nicodemus, who came to learn of Him by night; Joseph of Arimathea, who surrendered to Him his burial-place. We do not hear much about them. Theirs were quiet lives; and the secret of their quiet was that they 'waited for the kingdom.' In troubled times they trod the path of a fervent religious hope and found it a path of peace; and in our day it is still religion, religion at its highest and truest in the Christian faith, which produces among us the steadfast lives that calmly endure hardness.

¶ Referring to the fateful day when the decision against the United Free Church of Scotland was given by the House of Lords, Dr. Alexander Whyte writes: 'When I staggered down that fatal stair, and came out into the lobby in the House of Lords, I found my friend here—shall I call him my father or my brother? I am getting so old now I will call him my brother—there he was walking about the lobby with his splendid serenity. Men said, "Have you seen Rainy? How is he taking it?" And the answer was, "As smiling and happy as ever." And why? Because he has been long years rooted in God; he is an experienced, Christian man.'[1]

3. 'The quiet in the land' are those who know the quiet of God's house. To the Psalmist the place where God bowed down His ear to hear him was the place wherein he would fain have dwelt for ever, for there in inquiring of the Lord the world's dispeace was readily forgotten. Into this experience of the Psalmist we enter at the hour of worship. For then, as we bow ourselves in the house of prayer, we rest our world-worn minds in that assurance of 'the love of God which is

[1] *The Life of Alexander Whyte*, 443.

in Christ Jesus our Lord.' At such times the troubles and trials laid upon us by the world outside are powerless to break in upon this, our Christian assurance of the Father's care over us. And the place of worship becomes for us a very reservoir of quiet, flooding our souls.

¶ In my London days I used to turn aside sometimes from the bustle and turmoil of the city, and stand for a moment in the spacious quiet of St. Paul's Cathedral. How delectable that stillness seemed as one crept in from the roar and tumult outside! And, scattered about the great interior, one always saw, seated here and there, several with whom the world had gone hardly. There was a haggard expression in the face and a hunted look in the eye. They had turned into the sacred precincts for a moment's breathing-space. They had found sanctuary.[1]

Leaving Off.

Ps. xxxvi. 3.—'He hath left off to be wise, and to do good.'

In any city you will find men and women who have left off. They were active in some provincial town or in younger life, but they have dropped out, they have left off, they are a back number; they do not contribute anything to the general good; they do nothing now to help forward the Kingdom of God; they do nothing now but look after themselves, amuse themselves, or enjoy themselves. That is true of some people whose past, if we could search it, would be found to have in it somewhere a perfect hive of activity. They have left off. And it is one of the saddest things that could be written of a man. At best he is a cumberer of the ground; at the worst it is impossible to say what he is. Far better that a man should die, far better that he be prematurely worn out, than that this should come to be written: 'He hath left off to be wise, and to do good.'

1. What made him leave off?

(1) *Strong temptation.*—There is a fearful battle in the breast of man between wisdom and folly, good and evil. Times of storm come, when the very foundations of morality are broken up, when it seems as if wisdom were folly, as if self-denial were a piece of sheer stupidity, an unnecessary narrowing of life, a needless and foolish cutting oneself off from many pleasures. It seems so, and we are the easy victims of delusion, when the mind is clouded by doubt, and the god of this world blinds our eyes. But let a man ground himself on the absolutely solid rock of the Bible and its teaching, and on the word of our Lord. As surely as Christ lived and spoke, self-indulgence is the path of folly. Wisdom lies in purity, in the fear of God, in doing good; and there are found the springs of the deepest and sweetest joy.

¶ The sirens sing that indulgence is better than obedience. This was the temptation that ruined Eden. It is perhaps the primal transgression in man's downward career.

The first lesson one needs to learn, who would grow into the life of God, is the lesson of submission to the supreme will, of surrender to the impulses whose tides are towards divine companionship.

This involves the stern repression of every tendency that is in conflict with the eternal purpose, and implicit obedience to the infinite will.

Sin, however, says that self-will is supreme. It whispers that man is the goal of his own existence, that he has no higher mission than to please himself, and that to indulge himself is better than to obey his master.

The man who surrenders life to this pleasant lie has made further development and growth for himself impossible. He has locked the gates of glory against himself and barred his own being out from fellowship with the divine.[1]

(2) *The difficulty of doing good.*—It is always a battle. We have to go against something within us, and there is not only

[1] F. W. Boreham, *The Uttermost Star*, 241.

[1] J. I. Vance, *Tendency*, 48.

this pull from within, there is the counter-attraction from without. Even at this time of day the majority of people are not wise, and they are not engaged in doing good. It is a solitary path for many, and we are very dependent on, tremendously influenced by, our surroundings, by the atmosphere of custom and fashion. To rise above the acknowledged standard of the people about us, to go against the stream, to be singular, to be out of it, to breathe the breath of scorn is more difficult than anybody knows save those who have tried it.

¶ He was by no means a prig, but he always stood out for those things which were good and pure, and was not afraid to own his allegiance to his Lord. His house-master said of him: 'I remember how, when almost head of my House, he displayed conspicuously on the wall of his room a printed roll of texts from the Bible—an open avowal of his belief.' This is not an easy thing for a boy to do.[1]

(3) *The lack of encouragement.*—We hold on to the path of wisdom; we do what we know to be right; we are kind and helpful, and not a soul says, 'Well done!' Not a word or sign of appreciation is given us. Our good-doing is like water spilt on the ground—swallowed up, forgotten and lost. It is useless striving and fighting and working; we make no headway—the struggle naught availeth. That is why people leave off. They break down, they throw up everything as Elijah did, and get under some juniper-tree; they nurse a sullen and resentful mood for a while, and then they join the Baal crowd, or they retire from the struggle; and it is all wrong. In God's name, and in the name of our future peace and usefulness, let us not leave off—we had better die. We are, very likely, within measurable distance of victory. Often and often when we have indulged in a mood of pessimism some bit of encouragement has come, rebuking our unworthy belief; and whether it comes or not, remember that it is never vain to do the right—to serve God—to be pure.

[1] J. Robson, *Ion Keith-Falconer of Arabia*, 13.

¶ For it often happens that when a man is spending all his efforts on something, and it does not come about in the way or to the end that he wants, his mind falls into weariness and sadness, as if he reflected and said: 'It is better for thee to give up this enterprise which thou hast begun and worked on so long, as it is not yet come to an end: and to seek peace and quiet in thy own mind.' Then the soul ought to reply boldly, hungering for the honour of God and the salvation of souls, and decline personal consolation, and say: 'I will not avoid or flee from labour, for I am not worthy of peace and quiet of mind. Nay, I wish to remain in that state which I have chosen, and manfully to give honour to God with my labour, and my labour to my neighbour.' Yet sometimes the devil, to make our enterprises weary us, when we feel little peace of mind, will make a suggestion to the man, saying in his thought: 'I am doing more harm in this thing than I am deserving good. So I would gladly run away from it, not on account of the labour, but because I do not want to do harm.' Oh, dearest father, do not yield either to yourself or the devil, nor believe him, when he puts such thoughts into your heart and mind; but embrace your labour with gladness and ardent desire, and without any servile fear.[1]

2. What happens when anyone leaves off? He goes on deteriorating. No man stands still. The leaving off to be wise seems a negative thing, but nothing remains negative. Nature abhors a vacuum, and a man's leaving undone the things he ought to have done is immediately followed, if not preceded, by the doing of the things he ought not to have done. The man who leaves off to be wise becomes a fool, and that of the worst kind, and he who leaves off to do good soon does evil. So it is in the Psalm; the text with its negative statement is followed by the positive, 'He deviseth mischief upon his bed; he setteth himself in a way that is not good; he abhorreth not evil.'

[1] *Saint Catherine of Siena as seen in her Letters*, 212.

¶ There were some very loose and wicked men in the place of business where I was for a time. But the very worst of them all, the most reckless and abandoned, was an ex-Sunday-school teacher, a man who had become the veritable slave of the devil. He was a positive genius in the way of inventing evil things.[1]

3. Is there no recovery? The temptation that always reaches a man who has left off is that he must keep on in the path he has begun. Done is done and there is no undoing is the lying whisper that reaches him. He has made his bed and chosen his company, and by his choice he must abide—that is the temptation. But it is all, thank God! untrue. The world is not constructed on that fashion. If it be true that a man can leave off to be wise and to do good, if the Creator has endowed him with that amount of moral freedom, then he has at least the same freedom on the other side: he can leave off to be a fool and to do evil. That is a perfectly rational statement, because we are living in a rational and fair universe, and the statement is based on experience and on abounding evidence. The fool has become a wise man, the evil-doer has left his wrong-doing. The Old Testament consistently declares that, and the voice of God is always calling men to it. 'Depart from evil and do good.' 'Cease to do evil, learn to do well.' 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him *return* unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him.' It may be said that the prolonged appeal of the prophets of the Old Testament is to an apostate and foolish people to return to God, to wisdom, and to the path of right doing. The Bible is always dealing with people who have left off.

It is too late, too late!
My house is left unto me desolate.
Yet what if here, [fear,
Through this despair too dark for dreams of
Through the last bitterness of the last vain tear,
One saw a Face—
Human—not turned away from man's disgrace—
A face divinely dear—
A Head that had a crown of thorns to wear;
If there should come a hand
Drawing this tired head to a place of rest
On a most loving Breast?
And as one felt that one could almost bear
To tell the whole long sickening trivial tale
Of how one came so utterly to fail
Of all one once knew that one might attain—
If one should feel consoling arms about,
Shutting one in, shutting the black past out—
Should feel the tears that washed one clean again,
And turn, made dumb with love and shame, to hear:
'My child, my child, do I not understand?'[1]

[1] C. Brown.

Mountains.

Ps. xxxvi. 6.—'Thy righteousness is like the great mountains.'

THE marginal reading of the Authorized Version and the corrected one of the Revisers is: 'Thy righteousness is like the mountains of God.' That is a fine translation, for no other object on the face of the earth, except the sea, appears to be so clearly the work and property of God as the great mountain. There is a majesty and a mystery about it which proclaim it to have been made and kept for God. Men, in building their houses and planting their gardens and sowing their cornfields, think so much of the little share they have in making towns and growing harvests that they swell with pride, and take the glory to themselves—speaking of *our* houses, *our* harvests. These are the result of *their* labours, they say to themselves; it is because they worked that they now possess that house and harvest. God's share in the result is forgotten. But man had nothing to do with the making of the mountain; no human brain was ever

[1] E. Nesbit, *Ballads and Verses of the Spiritual Life*, 43.

taxed by the tax of its uprearing, no man's hand helped to lay its foundation. There it stands, high and hoary, beautiful and serene, a perpetual testimony to God's might, and a lasting rebuke to man's distrust in God's creative and sustaining power. The mountains are 'the mountains of God.' That was the Psalmist's thought; it shows that he was a poet. The charm of the poet is that he sees the inner heart of things, reads them through and through, and brings out of them treasures which before we had only dimly discerned.

So the comparison which the Psalmist makes is between the righteousness of God and the mountains of God. In one sense we cannot compare righteousness with mountains, for they belong to altogether different spheres. The one is a moral quality, and the other is a physical object. The one is uncreated and self-derived, the other is a dependent creation. The smallest thing that has life and self-consciousness, the humblest creature that knows right from wrong, is transcendently more valuable and important than the grandest mass of dead matter. But though in this sense we cannot find any comparison between the creature and the Creator, there is another sense in which we see an interesting relation between them. We can say that what the mountains are in the physical sphere, the righteousness of God is in the moral. It is a question of analogy. It is a comparison, not of things, but of terms. We say that as the great mountains affect the eye and mind, so the righteousness of God affects the soul. They produce upon our minds an impression which is somewhat akin. A well-known German philosopher said that the two things which impressed him most deeply were the starry heavens and the moral law. No one can stand beneath the clear midnight sky in winter, studded with brilliant stars, without being profoundly stirred. No one who has a sensitive conscience and a keen moral perception can think of the majesty of the Divine Law without being awed. And the Psalmist in the Nineteenth Psalm places the two revelations of God, in Nature and in the Law, side by side in the most suggestive and impressive manner. The mountains—which are the grandest objects of Nature, which mingle with the clouds and claim kindred with the skies, which announce the rosy dawn long ere the darkness has left the valleys, and wear upon their brow as a diadem the star of evening—appeal to us in the same way as the Law of God, which draws the soul of man with silent but irresistible power from the visible to the invisible, from itself to the whole universe which it affects.

Two points of comparison may be made.

1. *Their Stability.*—Mountains are the most enduring of all earthly objects. They are the pillars of the earth, that continue firm and unchanged while all else is slowly but surely passing away. Year after year, age after age, they remain unmoved, while the fleeting generations of man, like broken billows of the sea, spend themselves at their feet. Whole dynasties pass, and feeble scars are all that time has engraved upon their brows. Amid the wreck of centuries and races, they stand mute monuments of all, sublime, alone. But the righteousness of God is more stable than the everlasting mountains. It is the Divine principle which maintains the mountains in existence; which determines their exact shape and position, and size and material, in accordance with the most perfect balancing of Nature, and the most efficient carrying on of her operations. The mountains are what they are, and stand where they stand, according to the strictest laws of equity. And shall not the Divine righteousness, which is the cause of all this wonderful order and harmony, prove more stable than the objects themselves in which it is seen illustrated? The mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but His kindness will not depart from us, nor the covenant of His peace be removed.

The righteousness that moulds and upholds the mountains is from everlasting to everlasting. It is an essential principle in God's nature; it is the fundamental truth of religion. He upon whom creation hangs, and in whom all His creatures trust, is the same, yesterday,

to-day, and for ever. Destitute of this unchangeable righteousness, He would cease to be God. No dependence could be placed upon the laws of Nature were a capricious being regulating them; and human life would be a fitful, feverish dream, harassed continually by the mysteries of accident and chance. But invested with this glorious attribute, inwoven, as it were, into His very nature, and constituting the imperishable aspect in which all His other attributes are displayed—what a sublime object of contemplation does He present to the devout soul!

¶ In the *Life of John Viriamu Jones*[1] we read that his father Thomas Jones, preaching on the unchangeableness of God, 'told how as a lad he had visited his native place, an orphan and alone. The old folk he had known were gone; the companions he had loved were scattered. He walked the streets, but no one knew him: he was a stranger in his own city. He went to the house where he was born—where he first smiled in his mother's face and climbed on his father's knee—but all there were strangers to him. Going by night to the old churchyard, where the bodies of his parents had been laid to rest, he knelt by the green mounds which marked their graves, in the silence of the moonlight; and there, in his loneliness, his heart almost breaking with desire, he raised his eyes and beheld the encircling hills ranged as an army to defend him, just as when a child he saw them first; and he heard a voice saying: "I, the Lord, change not; Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day and for ever." '

2. *Their Beneficence.*—Mountains are more precious than cornfields and meadows. Without them no meadows or cornfields could exist. Without mountains no human being could live upon the earth. Without mountains there would be no dry land; and one shoreless ocean would tumble round the globe. By elevating some portions of land above the rest, and so forming mountains, God conserved all the land. These elevated portions attract the clouds, which form the sources of streams and rivers that water the plains and create life and fertility wherever they flow. The very materials of the soil are ground and washed down from the mountains by these streams, which sow the dust of continents to be.

¶ I never see a lofty mountain enveloped with dark mist without a feeling of profound awe. That mist seems a veil behind which, in the inmost sanctuary of Nature, God is doing His wonderful work of mediation in Nature. Behind that veil the clouds are forming sources of rivers and streams, and the rocks are crumbling into soil that will enrich and fertilize the plains. Behind that veil the mountains are sustaining the violence of the storm, that other regions may be calm; are dreary and desolate and forsaken, that other regions may be bright and beautiful, and blessed with the most varied and joyful life. They are elevated above the rest of the earth, and endowed with exceptional grandeur, not for their own sakes only, but that they may diffuse the blessings of heaven over the parched places of the earth that need them, sacrificing themselves in so doing. And in all this I am reminded of the awful darkness around Calvary, that hill 'of God' above all others. I think of the Incarnate Righteousness who sacrificed Himself there for a lost and perishing world. The Son of God within that veil, in the inmost and holiest sanctuary of the universe, is suffering and dying, in order that the lost innocence of man may be regained and the lost beauty of the world restored; and I feel indeed that the righteousness of God is like the great mountains, not only in grandeur of nature, and stability of endurance and goodness of operation, but also in that quality which is the most transcendent of all—self-sacrifice; losing, that we might gain; becoming poor, that we might become rich; becoming sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. On Calvary we can no longer abstract the righteousness of God from the Living Person who is the Saviour of the sinner, who loves him with such infinite tenderness that He laid down His life for him, and who is spending all His efforts to draw him to Himself. And

[1] p. 5.

there, while we feel that we cannot atone for the least transgression of God's law, we know that Divine justice is satisfied with the sacrifice of infinite love.[1]

The Great Deep.

Ps. xxxvi. 6.—'Thy judgments are a great deep.'

In the language of the Bible, 'the judgments of God' are the purposes of the Divine will taking shape in human history, the self-manifestations of the Infinite under the conditions of time and space. 'The great deep,' also another common Bible phrase, is the wide blue sea, mightiest of God's earthly creations, that for ever rolls and tosses within the sight of man. So by the words of the text we are invited to take our stand upon its beach and, while we look out upon the great ocean, learn something of Him of whom it is declared, 'Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters.'

1. The first and most evident attribute of the great deep is *the never-ceasing character of its motion.* The ocean knows no Sabbath, no rest day, no hour of peaceful quiet. When we lay ourselves down upon our bed at night the plashing of the waves upon the beach tells us that there is no sleep for them. If we waken at dead of night the deep undertone of their motion reports itself at once to our opening ears. In the morning, as we stand upon the new-made beach, we read the proof that there is no period of inaction in the life of the great deep; that while earth and man may rest and sleep, the wide blue sea, like its great Creator, fainteth not, neither is weary.

Turn now from the great deep to Him who holds it in the hollow of His hand. The Infinite mind and will are necessarily and eternally active. In the realm of creation, of providence, and of grace there is no resting of the purpose of Deity, no slumbering of the judgments of the Almighty. Individual development, world-change, world-progress, the onsweeping life of universal nature—these all proclaim the ceaseless activity, the continuous self-manifestation of Him who is in all and through all, the fountain of all force, the impulse of all movement, the soul of all life.

As wonderful is His activity in the moral realm. In the soundless depths of a past eternity the purpose of redemption was fashioned. Since the first day of human history, where has there been shown any sign of end or rest? Promise has ripened into fulfilment. Through the shaking of the nations, through and over the oppositions of men, by the sweet breath of human love, by the harsh and strident gale of human wrath, is the ever-enlarging hope of the new humanity which is in and through Christ Jesus being swept forward; and of rest, of harbour, of anchorage there is yet no sign. What are all these movements, these changes, this progress, but the self-manifestation of the Infinite, the birth into time and human history of the purposes of His immutable and omnipotent will.

2. But the ocean is not only unceasing in its activity, it is sublimely *irresistible in the mightiness of its power.* We watch the ocean, even in its hours of play, with much the same feeling that we look upon the sporting of the wild beast, not knowing how soon its sport may give place to rage, and its harmless activity change to a superhuman destructiveness. But while the ocean always and everywhere impresses the human mind with the idea of unlimited power, there are times and seasons when its majestic force thrills us with a more awesome wonder. The storm is an even grander exhibition of the ocean's power than the tide. When the heavens grow black above its uneasy masses, and lurid lightning cuts this blackness into horrible gashes; when the winds, as if let loose from the gates of hell, whip into foam the sweeping billows until one would think the deep were hoary; when there succeeds to the momentary calm, which is itself frightful, the first burst of the hurricane, and to that low moaning and indistinct muttering of mighty wrath, the thunder of the wild billows coming forth rank after rank from their

[1] Hugh Macmillan.

garrison in the deep; when these voices are all answered back by the angry voices of the sky; when the deep below calls unto the deep above, then how puny seems the noblest conception of human power—how majestically terrible the aroused might of the great ocean!

Turn to that of which it is the symbol. 'The voice of the Lord is upon the waters . . . which stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people.' The Divine purposes as they manifest themselves in human history are not only irresistible, but they move on to their end through the use of the humblest instrumentalities, through agencies and influences which seem contemptible to human eyes. This is the grandest conceivable exhibition of measureless force.

Of such exhibitions of power the history of our world is full. When Jehovah, Israel's God, would, for His chosen people, conquer the menacing host of the Midianites, He sends against them, not the thirty thousand which were at His command, but three hundred only. He smites the giant of Gath with a pebble from a stripling's sling; scatters an army by the flash of a lamp and the blare of a trumpet; revolutionizes the world by twelve fishermen; reforms the church by a single-handed monk as against the power of pope and prince and emperor; and through the centuries, by means of the 'foolishness of preaching,' carries forward a work by which are shaped the fate of nations and the history of the world. These are examples of the ineffable ease with which the purposes of the Divine administration work to their appointed end in the development of our race. Not only do they employ forces scorned of human judgment, but they make use of the oppositions of men to accomplish their designs.

Take the supreme illustration, and let it suffice for all. With wicked hands men seized and crucified heaven's well-beloved and earth's fairest Son. Yes! but Pilate, with a hand that he might not stay, was obliged to reach forth and write the word 'King' over the head of the dying Jesus; Joseph's sepulchre gave up to the world an immortal name and an endless power; and even the dumb cross, which had been unwittingly the agent of death, became a thing of life, the standard of an ever-increasing and invincible host. He who was cut off out of the land without issue and without generation, now counts His children by the thousands in every land that is visited by the sun. The Man of sorrows and of death has become the joy and the life of a world. 'Thy judgments are a great deep.'

3. A third characteristic of the great deep is *the order that controls all its movements*, that directs and tethers all the outreachings of its mighty power. This would not appear to the observer who should for the first time stand upon its shores. To him the rise and fall of its mighty waves, the incoming and the outgoing of its tidal masses would indicate no order, no voice, no law. But if such an observer should return day after day, and year after year, he would surely be forced to the conclusion that underneath the apparent lawlessness that first impressed him there was some regulative force governing the seemingly capricious movements. He would be sure to hear, breaking forth from the vast and weltering plain before him, the words of this mysterious voice: 'Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed.' As a matter of fact, men have stood now for centuries looking out from ocean's shore, and with what result? The table of the tidal movements can now be written down years before their occurrence; the equatorial and polar currents can now be mapped, and the racing gulf stream, and the yearly tide-rises, and the mysterious undertows, these all can be charted for the guidance of the adventurous voyager.

By our text we are warranted in attributing a similar order to the judgments of the Almighty, to the purposes of the overruling Power, as these manifest themselves in the affairs of our disordered world. It is true that the philosophy of history is yet but poorly understood and imperfectly written. Historians stand upon the mighty beach of our world's life, and in the activity of its great

forces see nothing but so much confused and aimless motion; so much result and effect of human passion and human greed; so much outwriting of the uncontrolled desires of human hearts and the ungoverned purposes of the human will. Hence and through all the centuries they have been lifting up this voice: 'Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.' But this is only because these observers have not stood long enough upon the world-encircling beach, or long enough with eyes opened by the touch of the Divine Spirit marked down the movements upon which they looked.

Through the ages one increasing purpose runs. And with unresting and invincible force it is sweeping onward to the end of universal order and everlasting righteousness. No doubt there are isolated events, anomalous plans, great crises and centuries in our world's life which seem to be so many retrograde currents. So there is upon the bosom of the incoming tide a multitude of wavelets whose movement is away from the shore. But, taught by the intuition of the soul and by the past progress of the human race, must we not say that the current of human history shall yet lift itself up into and break upon the front of the great white throne in the exulting joy of this millennial chorus: 'The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever'? So shall order grow out of that which we now deem confusion, and so shall the judgments of the Infinite One—now a great and weltering maze before the eyes of men—stretch themselves out as a sea of glass, mirrored in which the universe shall read for evermore the grace and the glory, the wisdom and the power of Him who is the Creator of worlds, the Father of men, and the King of all our earth.[1]

[1] S. S. Mitchell.

God is working His purpose out
  As year succeeds to year;
God is working His purpose out,
  And the time is drawing near;
Nearer and nearer draws the time,
  The time that shall surely be
When the earth shall be filled with the glory
    of God
  As the waters cover the sea.

The Greater Realism.

Ps. xxxvi. 7, 8.—'How precious is thy loving kindness, O God! And the children of men take refuge under the shadow of thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures' (RV).

This Psalm begins in the darkness of an awful night; it ends in the dawning of a gladsome day. It begins in the portrayal of the ravages of sin; it ends in the triumphant announcement of its overwhelming defeat. In the beginning of the Psalm we are confronted with the spectacle of things as they are; at the end of the Psalm we are permitted the privilege of contemplating the grandeur of things as they will be.

1. The earlier verses are concerned with an analysis of the method and destructiveness of sin. The first four verses describe the successful ravages which sin makes in human life. They gave us a diagnosis of evil, from its earliest appearance in the germ to its complete and final triumph. Now how does sin begin?

(1) We shall find, if we look at the margin of the Revised Version, a rendering which gives us the germ, the first appearance, the beginning of sin in human life. How, then, does it read? 'Transgression uttereth its oracle to the wicked within his heart.' 'Transgression uttereth its oracle,' speaks within himself in tones of imperious authority, lays down certain assurances, interpolates certain suggestions, and clothes them with imperial authority. One has heard of oracles of conscience, one has heard of the authoritative speech of the moral sense.

But here the Psalm announces an oracle of the devil. The devil begins his ministry by oracular suggestions, by mysterious whispers, subtle enticements to sin. That is the germinal work of the devil; a mystic, secret oracle seeking to entice the life into ways of sin.

(2) The secret enticement is followed by equally subtle stratagem. In the second verse we read of the second step in this degeneracy. 'He' (that is the oracle) 'flattereth him in his eyes that his iniquity shall not be found out and be hated.' Two things the oracle says, and he says them with impartial authority. First, that sin shall not be found out, and secondly, that therefore there is no fear of reprobation. It is only a repetition of a word with which we are very familiar in the earlier portion of the old Book. There will be no penalty; there is no Nemesis; judgment is a fiction; there is no Great White Throne! 'He flattereth him that his iniquity shall not be found out and be hated.' 'God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.' 'And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die!' That is the oracle of sin, that is the subtle deception wrought upon us almost every day of our life.

(3) And now pass to the third step in the great degeneracy. The man has been listening to the secret oracle. He has been flattered by its suggestiveness. He is now persuaded by the enticement, and the moral degradation begins apace. 'The words'—the first things to be smitten—'The words of his mouth are iniquity and deceit.' The first thing that happens as soon as a man listens to the devil is that the bloom goes off the truthfulness of his life. He now enters the realm of equivocation and deceit; his seduction begins to show its fruit at the lips. 'He hath left off to be wise'; then he loses sense; he does not now exercise common-sense. His intelligence is narrowed, contracted and curtailed. 'He hath left off,' says the Psalm, 'to be wise'; he has walled up his understanding, and shut out the rays of God's own enlightening presence. But still further: 'He hath left off to do good.' The loss of brotherhood! He may continue to give money; but he has ceased to give self. The claims of philanthropic service no longer appeal to his spirit, they pass by unheeded and ignored.

(4) And now see what further happens in the stages of moral decay. 'He deviseth iniquity upon his bed; he setteth himself in the way that is not good.' The man now offers himself in positive enlistment on the side of the devil. He uses his mental equipment, his imagination, the finer powers of his mind, in the ministry of sin. 'He deviseth iniquity'; his imagination becomes defiled. 'He setteth himself in a way that is not good;' his will becomes enslaved. We are not surprised to learn the last clause in this portrayal of the spirit's degradation: 'He abhorreth not evil.' He has now reached the plain of moral benumbment; his moral palate has been defiled; the distinction between sweet and bitter is no longer apparent, sweet and bitter taste alike. He has no abhorrence of evil, and he has no sweet pleasure in the good. He has lost his power of moral discernment; he is morally indifferent, and almost morally dead.

Such is the diagnosis of sin, beginning in the whispered oracle and proceeding to absolute enslavement, passing through the intermediate stages of deception and delight. That is the moral condition of thousands of lives. The appalling tyranny of evil placards itself on every side. It is terrible as some awful plague, overmastering and ubiquitous. We cannot move without being confronted by its domination. It rears its bold and unashamed brow in the form of lust, and drunkenness, and avarice, and falsehood, and oppression, and cruelty, and over-reaching vanity, and senseless pride. It is all round about us, and when we are confronted with its widespread devastation, what can we do? The earlier verses of this Psalm, which give 'a diagnosis' of sin, were never more confirmed than they are in the literature of our own time. The literature of our time abounds in analysis of sin. Most of our novels have ploughed their weary way through the vile vapours of fierce and steaming wrongs. If we turn to Thomas Hardy's book, *Tess of the*

D'Urbervilles, or to *Jude the Obscure*, we shall find that Thomas Hardy is just carefully elaborating the first four verses of this Psalm. But, when his mournful psalm comes to an end, we close his book in limp and rayless bewilderment. That is where so much of our modern literature leaves us. It goes with the Psalmist to the end of verse four, diagnoses and describes sin, and then leaves us helpless and hopeless in the presence of its own gloomy recital. It gives us an analysis, but no inspiration: it gives us a fine diagnosis, but no remedial power.

2. But here is the Psalmist contemplating a similar spectacle—the ravages of sin, and he himself is temporarily bewildered; he himself is bowed low in helpless and hopeless mood. What does he do? Our Revised Version helps by the very manner in which the Psalm is printed. After verse four there is a great space, as though the Psalm must be almost cut in two, as though the Psalmist had gone away from the contmeplation of that spectacle, as indeed he has. He has left his *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* and gone away for awhile. And where has he gone? He has gone that he might quietly inquire whether the evil things he has seen are the biggest things he can find. He goes away with this query upon his lips: Is sin the all-stupendous thing before which all other things shrink away into insignificance and nothing? Is sin the mountain and all other things the molehills? This man tears his eyes away from the spectacle of sin, from the fascinating and almost mesmerising spectacle of sin; tears them away, and fixes them in searching, piercing quest of things that are bigger still. When the Psalm opens again after the pause, the Psalmist is joyfully proclaiming the bigger things he has found. What are they?

(1) 'Thy lovingkindness, O Lord, is in the heavens; thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds, thy righteousness is like the mountains, thy judgments are a great deep.' Mark the vastness of the figures in which he seeks to enshrine the vastness of his thought. Thy lovingkindness, O Lord, is in the heavens; thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds.' 'Thy lovingkindness, O Lord, is in the heavens,' bending like a mother's arms, the shining, cloudless sky! 'Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds,' and while we watch the clouds begin to gather, the clouds, those vast, changing ministers, now like spotless fleece, now like finest, softest lawn; now moving like dark, heavy battalions charged with thunder and destruction, vanishing in an hour, in an hour returning and eclipsing the genial and welcome blue! Most uncertain of all uncertainties, and yet 'Thy faithfulness reacheth even unto the clouds!' Those apparent children of caprice, coming and going no one knows how, are in God's loving control, and obey the behests of His most sovereign will. 'Thy righteousness is like the great mountains.' How majestic the figure! The mountains, the symbols of the Eternal, abiding through the generations; looking down upon the habitations of men, undisturbed, unchanged, unmoved. Thy righteousness is like the great mountains! Not that everything becomes clear when a man talks like that; the mystery remains! 'Thy judgments'—Thy ways of doing things—'Thy judgments are a great deep,' as immense and unfathomable as the incalculable sea. But then one may endure the mystery of the deep when one is sure about the mountain. When one knows that God's righteousness is like the mountain, one need not trouble about the sea. When one knows that His faithfulness ruleth even the clouds, one can trust the fickle sea.

(2) Where has the Psalmist been to discover these wonderful things? He is not recounting a bald catalogue of Divine attributes; he is announcing a testimony born of a deep and real experience. Where has he been? He has been the guest of God. And now we enter what is the very Holy of Holies in this Psalm, the words of our text. 'The children of men take refuge under the shadow of thy wings.' He has been there. That is the most beautiful of all the beautiful figures in the old Book. 'Under the shadow of thy wings.' The security of it! The absolute perfectness of the

shelter! The warmth of it! The untroubled peace of it! He has been in God's house, sheltering there as a chick under its mother's wings. And then he tells us what he received in the house, what he had when he was a guest, when he was hiding under the wings: 'They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house.' 'Fatness,' says an old Puritan, 'is the top, it is the cream of all spiritual delicacies.' It is the first, the prime thing! 'They shall be abundantly satisfied' with the delicacies of thy table! 'Thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures.' It is not only what there is upon the table; it is the conversation and the fellowship at the board. Everybody knows that sometimes the best of the feast is the 'flow of soul.' Thy speech, thy fellowship, thy whispers, thy promises, they just flow out into their souls like a river, and their joy shall be full.[1]

(3) Is it any wonder that this Psalmist, who had turned away from the sin of the world cast down and despondent, and who had gone to be the guest of God—is it any wonder that after he had been a while with Him he cried for joy, 'With thee is the fountain of life'? He was beginning to feel alive again; he was beginning to feel vitalized and renewed. And then he added: 'In thy light shall we see light' to do our work away yonder in the fields of sin! The very things he wanted: life and light! Inspiration and counsel! Encouragement and hope! And the promise of the old Book was fulfilled to him as he lay under the shadow of God's wings. It shall be to thee a 'spirit of counsel,' says the prophet, 'a spirit of counsel and might,' combined enlightenment and inspiration. As the Psalmist turned from the Presence Chamber to confront again the spectacle of depravity, he offered a prayer, and this was his prayer: 'O continue thy lovingkindness unto them that know thee; and thy righteousness to the upright in heart!' And then, as though he were afraid that when he got back to the waste again, and to the sin again, he himself might be overcome, caught up in the terrible drift and carried along, he added this prayer: 'Let not the foot of pride come against me, and let not the hand of the wicked drive me away.' Do not let me get into the general tendency of things, and by the general tendency be carried away! He offered a prayer that these cardinal things, the greatest things, might abide with him, and that when he went away into the world's waste field he might be able to stand.

And so this man came out of the secret chamber a knight of God! He goes back as all men ought to go back to their work when they have been in the Presence Chamber of God. They ought to turn to their work singing, and the songs ought to be, not songs of strife and warfare, but songs of victory. When the Psalmist turns again to the field of warfare, he marches with the phrase upon his lips: 'There are the workers of iniquity fallen: they are thrust down, and shall not be able to rise.' In that spirit of triumph, with the victory shining in his expectant eyes, he fought and won.

¶ The prevailing temper of our own literature makes the method of this Psalm invaluable to us. A large and influential number of our writers have lent themselves, with ability and earnestness, to such analysis of sin as we find in the first four verses of the Psalm. The inmost lusts and passions of men's hearts are laid bare with a cool and audacious frankness, and the results are inexorably traced in all their revolting vividness of action and character. I suppose that there has not been a period, at least since the Reformation, which has had the real facts of sin so nakedly and fearfully laid before it. The authors of the process call it Realism. But it is not the sum of the Real, nor anything like it. Those studies of sin and wickedness which our moral microscopes have laid bare are but puddles in a Universe, and the Universe is not only Law and Order, but is pervaded by the character of its Maker. God's mercy still reaches to the heavens, and His faithfulness to the clouds. We must resolutely and with 'pious obstinacy' lift our hearts to that, else we perish. I think of one very flagrant tale,

[1] J. H. Jowett.

in which the selfishness, the lusts and the cruelties of modern men are described with the rarest of power, and so as to reduce the reader to despair, till he realizes that the author has emptied the life of which he treats of everything else, except a fair background of nature which is introduced only to exhibit the evil facts in more horrid relief. The author studies sin in a vacuum, an impossible situation. God has been left out, and the conviction of His pardon. Left out are the power of man's heart to turn, the gift of penitence, the mysterious operations of the Spirit, and the sense of the trustfulness and patience of God with the worst souls of men. These are not less realities than the others; they are within the knowledge of, they bless, every stratum of life in our Christian land; they are the biggest realities in the world to-day. Let us then meet the so-called Realism of our times with this Greater Realism. Let us tell men who exhibit sin and wickedness apart from God and from man's power of penitence, apart from love and from the realised holiness of our human race, that they are working in a vacuum, and their experiment is therefore the most un-real that can be imagined. We may not be able to eliminate the cruel fact of sin from our Universe, but do not let us therefore eliminate the rest of the Universe from our study of sin. Let us be true to the Greater Realism.[1]

A River of Pleasures.

Ps. xxxvi. 8.—'Thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures.'

1. 'God never keeps the best wine to Himself,' says Dr. Matheson; 'He makes His people drink from the river of His own pleasures. It is a marvellous thought that a finite creature should be allowed to have infinite joy. What is infinite joy? It is not so much joy beyond bounds as joy beyond boundaries. It is the joy in everything that is outside of myself. The river of God's pleasures is the happiness in others being happy. Its peculiarity is told in the Book of Genesis; it *went out* of Eden, and from thence it was parted, and became four heads. That is ever its description. It will not remain in its own Eden. It goes out from its personal joy. It breaks its own unity. It insists on dividing itself, sharing itself. Often have I thought of these words: "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands." One would think there was no prosperity about it. Was it not a sacrifice? Yes; but the pleasure of the Lord *is* sacrifice. It is the joy of giving joy, and therefore of giving up. It is the gladness of parting with a portion of the waters. It is the making of the wine of Cana by shedding the blood of Calvary.'

2. But what is the *river* of God's pleasures? What is it but just this—God made available for us, God putting Himself most graciously within our reach? That is the meaning of everything that God has done in the world's history and is doing for us. There is in every developed religious life a threefold stage. First, God is. Then God is with us in the person of His son. Then God is nearer yet and closer still—He is *in* us. By a spiritual communion, by an inwrought sense of love, He becomes our very possession. The love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost given unto us; and the river is ever the emblem of the Holy Ghost. 'My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God,' and in the river we drink of Himself as the pleasure and satisfaction of our life. God is not far off as we thought, in His high heaven, amidst His holy angels, but nigh at hand, wrapping us about with His goodness; clothing us as He clothes the flowers; ministering to us as He ministers to the birds, but with a tenderness infinitely deeper and more gracious than they can ever know. 'As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.' What does that mean but that the great God in heaven comes down to give Himself to me, and puts Himself within my reach? I am to take His hand, to know Him as my own; I

[1] G. A. Smith, *Four Psalms*, 60.

am to find His almighty power available for my weakness, to find His infinite wisdom guiding my steps. He Himself is to be my Friend, with whom I am to walk and talk. My life is to find in Him its refuge, its strength, its peace, its joy. As the river gives itself for the satisfying and gladdening of the earth, so my life is to be cheered and brightened and gladdened and blest by His presence.

There it is—a thing *available;* not only to think about, not only to sigh for, but to drink of and live. The great love of God is really to minister to us and refresh us and satisfy us. This is what Jesus comes to bestow. 'If thou knewest the gift of God and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.'

¶ I have seen once or twice that strange sight, the mirage, as clearly as one could see anything—the groups of living trees, the bright gleam of a lake, so exact that I should have maintained against everybody that it was a lake. Could I not see it with my own eyes? But suddenly it melted away into the barren nothingness. Image of the river of pleasures after which we pant and toil, but of which men never drink. There it is, but ever a little farther off. Just beyond the stretch of desert we will lie down and take our fill of its cool waters. But the stretch of desert sand goes on with us, and the lake is ever farther away. At our feet, within our reach, is this river of God's pleasures. Ours it is to know God as our Father in Jesus Christ; ours to live in the blessed consciousness of His presence and favour, to lie down at rest in His care. Ours it is to drink and live.[1]

3. Only the river of God's pleasures can satisfy the whole nature. We are too great for any but our Creator Himself. There are deeper wants than any other can minister to, higher and greater needs than any other hand can satisfy.

¶ I read in the paper some time ago of the gold-fields discovered in British Columbia. Here is an extract: 'A miner from Klondyke who has returned to Montana tells of the great hardships experienced in the wild gold regions, and declares that in the course of three years he saw over two hundred graves. A large majority of the deaths had been caused by starvation. He admits, however, that gold abounds in the district.' Was ever so grim a picture? There in the tent lies the gaunt skeleton, and tight in his bony grip the yellow gold, the hard and shining gold of which he had dreamed and for which he had toiled, and having which he said he would have all and be in need of nothing. And lo! he held the treasure in his grasp, and sank and died for want of a crust of bread. There is a terrible price paid for the possession of many a thing that a man counts good—a higher price than even the miner paid for his gold. Truth, goodness, love, purity, honour, these are dead, dead whilst the man grasps the treasure that he coveted. How good to turn from such a scene to these words, 'Thou shalt make them to drink of the river of thy pleasures'—the river of the water of life which ministers to all within us, and brings a perfect satisfaction.[1]

[1] M. G. Pearse, *The God of our Pleasures*, 25.

The Light of Divine Principle.

Ps. xxxvi. 9.—'In thy light shall we see light.'

'In thy light shall we see light.' That is what navigation says to astronomy. 'In thy light shall we see light.' That is what architecture says to the imagination. 'In thy light shall we see light.' That is what the builder says to the plumb-line. 'In thy light shall we see light.' That is what the driver of the railway engine says to the green or red signal. 'In thy light shall we see light.' That is what the traveller on the way of life says to the luminous shining of a moral principle.

That is the kind of help that is given to us in the New Testament. The New Testament gives us the primary light for all our reason. The New Testament does not present all our problems to us in detailed solution. It does not impose its thinking upon us in a kind of

[1] M. G. Pearse, *The God of our Pleasures*, 29.

peptonized food which makes no demand upon our mental mastication and digestion. That might appear to be the easier way; but like all easier ways it would have condemned us to perpetual invalidism, with all its train of gloomy issues. Christ Jesus refused to do the thinking for men, even when He was invited and urged to do so. Many times people came to Him, bringing their problems with them, and asking Him to give them a solution which would be as simple as A B C. But He never did it, and yet He did not send them empty away. He gave them the primary light, the major premise in the vital logic of life, and He left them to apply it, to make their own deductions, and to draw their own conclusions. He gave them a lamp, but He left them to make their own quest.

Now, it remains that we are to seek for that fountain-light if our ways are to be enlightened. We are to begin with the Divine premise, the major premise, and with that as our beginning we are to reason firmly forward to practical issues. If our footing is to be sure, if we are to move with stately confidence in the solution of our problems, we must recognize the absolute necessity of a background of Divine principle. Without that background of principle, that light in which all our enlightenment is to be found, there will be deadly falsities in our reasoning, we shall walk in utter confusion, and all our feverish movements will register no stable advance. If we have no standing ground of immutable principle none of our problems can be sanely and satisfactorily solved. It is only in God's light that we can see light.

¶ At a certain church conference some time ago two of the speakers discussed the vice of gambling, and both of them described it as one of the gravest menaces of our national life. But how did they approach this serious menace to the community? Did they begin from a clear, luminous background of Divine principle, and in that principle find the fire of their indictment, and the inspiration of reform? Let us hear what the President of the Conference said. He began by saying that he regarded gambling as 'the greatest danger of modern times.' He went on immediately to add 'I am prepared to forgive the owner of a race-horse backing in a moderate way the chances of the beautiful animal that he has trained and that he takes pride in.' Now, in what luminous principle does that reasoning begin? There is no clear principle shining down that road. It begins with the confusion of moral values. The President has no objection to the owner of a race-horse backing his beautiful animal 'in a moderate way.' But why in a moderate way? Is the solution of the problem found in the question of amounts? And then, what is a moderate way? At what figure does the wealthy owner of the race-horse pass the limits of permissibility, and thereby convert his virtue into a vice? At what point does the thing become a menace, and in what way is the menace born? If we may all gamble 'in a moderate way,' at what figure do we cross the danger line? When I read the President's words I somehow recalled a couplet I was seriously taught in my childhood, and which is at once an example of bad morals and bad rhymes:—

> It is a sin to steal a pin,
> Much more to steal a greater thing.

'Much more!' And so the deadliness of theft is in proportion to the amount that is stolen. It is a sin to steal a silver watch, much more to steal a gold one. The President declared that gambling 'in a moderate way' is all right, but when it passes the bounds of moderation it becomes a menace to our national life. There is no high principle in that judgment. There is no light in that lamp. And when the President goes on to appeal to the working man of this country to enjoy his football team without gambling there is no constraint in his appeal, for there is no grip of a great moral principle which conveys pulse and vigour, and which rouses the conscience, and enlists its strength in a great crusade.

There was another speaker at the conference who discussed the same national vice. And from what luminous background of moral principle did he approach his theme? Let

us listen to him. 'Of all human vices gambling is the vice which it is most difficult to condemn outright. . . . If I were asked whether a millionaire commits a sin when he plays cards for twopenny points I could not proclaim judgment upon him.' But why? 'The question,' he goes on to say, 'is one of degree.' And therefore we are back at the President's benediction of gambling, if it is done 'in a moderate way.' And there we are back again at the pin and the greater thing. But this second speaker is still more explicit. 'It is not immoral, it is not positively sinful that a man should gamble, unless he risks more than he can afford to lose.' Well, in answer to this I would declare my own conviction, that there is no background of Divine principle shining in the judgment, and when this speaker also goes on to appeal to the working man to cut out of the football matches what he calls 'the gangrenous sore of gambling,' there is no virility in his words, for it lacks the nobility of principle in which all moral vigour is born.

And so I would urge the young men and women of our day, into whose hands are to be committed mighty destinies, to begin all their reasonings about things—whether they be personal problems, or problems of nation and of race, or problems of industry, or problems of international relationship—to begin all their reasonings about these things from principles which have been given to us by Jesus Christ our Lord. Those principles are not many in number; indeed they are few. The grandest lives are the simplest, and they are guided by a few splendid stars. And the great need of the world to-day, in civic politics, in national politics, and international politics, is the need of men and women who hold a few high and splendid principles, and who will follow those principles along any and every road, in perfect assurance that they are the stars which will lead to the child Jesus, and to the secrets of the Kingdom of God.

Let us take time to learn those principles, and let us reverently receive them as the primary basis of all thought and action. 'Learn of me,' says Jesus, 'for such learning is the pre-requisite in all wise reasoning, and the first secret in all prosperous action.' In many of our problems, perhaps in the majority of them, it is quite enough to say 'Christ' in the thick of them, and the tangle of difficult country blazes for miles around. Sometimes it is one of Christ's great words which will shine among our perplexities like one of the greater planets in the darkness of the night. Sometimes a simple parable will furnish the needful interpreter when we are troubled by strange tasks which approach us like a people speaking in an unknown tongue. Sometimes in Christ Jesus there comes a revelation of God which throws a flood of light on the fellowship of man; it is like the coming of dawn upon a landscape, and we see and know our road. At other times we find our lamp in one of the doings of our Lord; He acts, and the act sends its revealing rays down a thousand roads of human interest and service. 'Learn of me,' says Jesus, 'learn of me!' That learning is the pre-requisite in all practical knowledge, for the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. 'In thy light shall we see light.' [1]

Evildoers.

Ps. xxxvii. 1.—'Fret not thyself because of evildoers.'

When the Psalmist tells us not to 'fret' ourselves because of evildoers, he certainly does not mean to encourage a spirit of indifference to the prevalence of evil. That would be utterly contrary to the whole spirit of this Divine revelation. The struggle of right against wrong, of God against our enemy, is the burden of the history of Israel, and the essential meaning of the incarnation and crucifixion of the Son of God. Indeed, we need look no further than the Psalms to find the strongest expressions of determination to fight against evil in all forms. Such as this in the Seventy-fifth Psalm, for example: 'The horns of the wicked will I cut off.' Neither in our text nor elsewhere in the Bible shall we

[1] J. H. Jowett.

discover any excuse for the policy of *laissez-faire*, which is popular with some who would leave vice at home, and heathenism abroad, unrebuked and unwarned.

The Hebrew word translated 'fret' occurs only here and in Prov. xxxiv. 19, where we read, 'Fret not thyself because of evil men.' Cheyne renders it in our text, 'Be not incensed against wicked men.' The warning is not directed against righteous anger, but against a discontented and bitter spirit, causing hatred to men and revolt against God. It is much the temper into which the Psalmist confesses that he fell, when in the Seventy-third Psalm he says, 'I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked!' The root of the sin lies in discontent with what God has ordained, or in disbelief that anything is ordained, in the feeling that things are not controlled by a God who has regard for right and for mercy.

1. First let us see who the evildoers are. In the Psalm itself the wickedness of the wicked is placed before us in most vivid and lurid colours.

(1) *He has no reverence for the right.*—He bows before no august moral ideal. There is no hill country in the vision of his soul. If he has seen the uplifted heights of moral rectitude he has turned his back upon them, as in old times the Swiss built their houses with their backs to the Alps. Now when men lose their reverence for a thing they are apt to acquire resentment for the thing and for those who possess it. That is a most subtle tendency, if indeed it is not the expression of a moral law. Lose your love, and love itself becomes hateful. Lose your virtue, and virtue itself becomes repellent. And this wicked man of the Psalms resents the righteous. 'He gnasheth upon him with his teeth.' A renegade from the right, he hates and persecutes the righteous. And resentment is accompanied by malicious plot and enterprise. He seeks the overthrow of the righteous. 'He plotteth against the just.' Powers become debased when life is unhallowed. When the moral ideal has faded from the soul, the highest powers become grovellers in very dirty ways. Imagination itself can become a groundling. The ingenuous can become the merely ingenious, scheming and plotting against the just.

(2) *He has no chivalry towards the defenceless.*—'He casts down the poor and needy.' We cannot lose reverence for the highest and retain our reverence for the lowest. No man can violate conscience and retain his sympathy. We cannot maim our manhood and preserve our humanity. If life loses its height it will also lose its breadth. If piety wither, pity will droop away. If reverence be smitten, chivalry will die.

(3) *He has no respect for moral covenants.*—'He borroweth and payeth not again.' That surely goes without saying. The man who has no sense of right will have no regard for rights. If there be no chivalry, there will be no fidelity. Other people will be esteemed as instruments to be used, fields to be exploited, pawns to be moved about in a selfish game. This man's word is not his bond; it is only the trifle of the hour, to be flung aside the next hour if selfish purpose demands it. His covenant is not a holy pledge, it is only a loose convenience.

Such is the man described in this Psalm. He is irreverent, unchivalrous, callous and numb. And this man climbs into high places, and attains the comforts and privileges of a successful life. He wields a great influence. He is 'in great power.' He is a leader, a despot, a tyrant. He climbs into prominent places; nay 'climbs' is scarcely the word to describe his advance. The way seems to be open to him, and he is offered the uppermost seats at the feast. And he fills a great space, 'spreading himself like a green bay tree.' He is like some wide-spreading tree, sucking up to itself all the resources of the immediate surroundings and leaving all other growth pinched and starved. He crowds other growths out, and he flaunts his arms in insensitive pride! We have all known him; we have all seen him; some perhaps have felt him. What a spread he makes! And yet his soul is steeped in wickedness, and the way

of his life is like a tortuous and deceitful road. That is the problem—vice in purple, virtue in rags.

2. Now what counsel does the Psalmist give us in face of this problem? First of all he describes certain moods as altogether unhelpful to a solution. And pre-eminently he discourages fretfulness. It is not unsuggestive that a Psalm dealing with this great problem should begin with this sentence—'Fret not.' It must be because fretting can be the prolific parent of exceedingly terrible issues. And so it can, and the darkening order is traced in the Psalm. Fretfulness drains the nervous forces of the life. Small frets can impoverish the life as much as a great anxiety. We can lose a pound by dropping a sovereign, or we can lose it by dropping 240 pennies. Fretfulness is the leakage of life's force at a hundred points. And then, secondly, fretfulness leads to irritableness and blind anger. 'Cease from anger and forsake wrath.' Who does not know that fretful men and women make themselves incapable of calm and steady judgment? They become highly sensitive, and their powers are incompetent to measure the scales of things. And thirdly, blind wrath leads to participation in the very things it condemns. 'Fret not thyself in any wise to do evil.' That is a very significant word; we begin by fretting at another man's evil, and we end by increasing the very evil we deplore. So we are counselled to put fretfulness aside.

(1) But the Psalmist proceeds to give two positive counsels: First *take long views.* We are first of all to exercise our sight over wider areas and seek the solution at a longer range of thought and outlook. There is always a peril of thinking in narrow and limited fields. Cecil Rhodes advised his fellow-countrymen to 'think in continents.' We may very fruitfully extend the application of the counsel. Many of us are impoverished by thinking in inches when we ought to think in miles; we think in moments when we ought to think in generations. We are bidden to turn this larger-ranged thinking to the prosperity of the wicked. How does it fare? Take your stand at the three score years and ten; how does the wicked arrive at that remote post? Go beyond that; go far beyond that, and how stands the judgment? Turn to this Psalm and listen to those verses whose refrains are like the guns in the Dead March, proclaiming the doom of the wicked: 'Yet a little while and the wicked shall not be.' 'The seed of the wicked shall be cut off.' 'Yet he passed away, and lo! he was not.' 'The end of the wicked shall be cut off.' Take the long view. And take the same long view in regard to the righteous. How does he fare at the end of the long day? What about the serenity when the journey is completed? 'Mark the perfect man and behold the upright, for the latter end of that man is peace.'

¶ 'Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him,' says the Psalmist; 'you will see the devices of the wicked perish and the meek inherit the earth.' You say, It does not look like it. I answer, It looks remarkably like it, if we 'believe what the years and the centuries say against the hours.' A modern writer draws a suggestive illustration from what is happening in the animal kingdom. He points out that the savage, intractable beasts of the world are being gradually exterminated as the wild districts are subdued, while those that prove themselves capable of entering into friendly co-operation with man survive and enter upon a new inheritance. So the tiger and the lion tend to disappear, while the horse, the ox, and the dog are permanent. And this because they have the capacity of helpful association with a higher kingdom. Is it not precisely the same thing that is happening in the human world? It is not through the brute qualities that nations survive. The bully goes under. Arrogance and aggression bring their own Nemesis. To do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with God—that is the sum of all political wisdom.[1]

(2) And the second part of the Psalmist's counsel is that we should *take deep views.* We are bidden to look beneath the surface of things, and to fix our regard upon qualities

[1] C. Allan, *The Beautiful Thing that has Happened to Our Boys*, 75.

rather than quantities. 'The meek shall inherit the earth.' Is that really true? Is there an inheritance of which the banking account can give no estimate? Which had the greater inheritance, Dives or Christ, Nero or Paul, Napoleon or Wordsworth? One man may own the pictures while another has the artistic appreciation. One man may possess the estate while another owns the landscape. One man may have comforts while another man has comfort and peace. 'The little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked.' When we take the deep view we have access into another world, where classifications are entirely reversed.

A throne without thy blessing
Were labour without rest,
And cottages possessing
Thy blessedness, are blest.

¶ Ever has it been true of our wise master-builders that

The passive master lent his hand
To the vast soul that o'er him planned.

The great men who saved India for us, the Lawrences and their kind, all had this world-building and earth-inheriting quality, which the Bible calls 'meekness.' They were men 'under authority,' under law to a Higher than themselves. And that is why their work endures. The truth is that the brute in man is in process of extermination. To 'move upward, working out the beast,' is the way to survival. There is no other adequate interpretation of the world's history. Such are the comfort and hope that are ours if we have power to look beneath the surface. Let us have faith in God. He 'comes in' and in the deepest and most fundamental way. The world, after all, is His world, and the man who will keep and deserve to keep his place in it will be increasingly the man who lets God have His way with him—who is content to seek a higher end than His own.[1]

[1] C. Allan, *The Beautiful Thing that has Happened to Our Boys*, 77.

Worry.

Ps. xxxvii. 1.—'Fret not.'

Don't worry. Don't be anxious and troubled about many things. Don't let that feeling gain on you of being rushed—driven—which is so painfully common nowadays, and yet so wholly fatal to really good work. Don't fret. The injunction sounds a very homely and commonplace one, scarcely worthy, perhaps, of being ranked with the larger and deeper Christian truths of which a preacher may treat, and yet it really goes very deep indeed, and it would mean a very great deal to our lives if only we could faithfully respond to it.

1. First of all, look at it from the merely physical side. Is it not undeniably true that 'it's not work that kills but worry'? What else is the meaning of all the 'rest-cures' of which we hear so much in these days but just this, that it isn't our bodies that get out of order so much as our nerves, and that the trouble with them comes from all the friction and care, the worry and fret of which our modern life seems so terribly full? If we could find the secret of escaping all that, would not the simple gain to health be enormous? Would it not be worth almost anything to us?

2. But the trouble goes far deeper than a merely physical one. Do you remember those words which come a little further on in the Psalm—'Fret not thyself, *else shalt thou be moved to do evil'?* And isn't that intensely true; haven't we known it again and again—perhaps very sadly—in our own experience? That bitter, cutting, unkind word for which you were so heartily sorry afterwards—of which you felt, as we often say, that you would sooner have bitten your tongue off than let it come out—how did it escape you, whatever possessed you to utter it? Wasn't it just that you were worried, irritable, fretted, you had lost control of yourself for the minute, and then the harm was done? And

perhaps—say or do what you might afterwards—it couldn't be wholly undone again, it couldn't be as though the word never had been spoken. Or, again, that letter, so smart, so crushing, so clever, which yet you had hardly sent off to the post when you felt you would give anything to recall it, only you couldn't, it was too late then—whatever made you write it? It was just the same trouble, wasn't it? You never would have written—never would have dreamed of writing it—if you had waited a little, if you had slept on it first. But you were worried, annoyed, out of temper with yourself and therefore with everyone else, and you just sat down and dashed it off. In what numberless cases has that warning been most abundantly, most sadly, justified: 'Fret not thyself, else shalt thou be moved to do evil!'

¶ Even Livingstone on one such worry-beset day lost his head and whipped out a revolver *à la* St. Peter. And his was no fly-away nature, remember: Scotch caution flowed in his veins. The local chief insisted for days (with all a weak man's obstinacy) on barring his progress, and the Doctor flashed back in irritated expostulation. But the fact that he had not even a nodding acquaintance with their dialect made matters worse and tricked him into some silly empty-revolver melodrama. Just so: the very thing they were egging him on to do, the very thing Livingstone regularly did not do. He regretted it afterwards. And in his regret one mighty fact swallowed up all lesser emotions; I mean, the clear comprehension that this Dick Turpin stunt was against his own ideal mode of moving amongst these black Sons of Belial. He had written against it, spoken against it, and years afterwards they cited this stupid pistol-pointing episode against him to Giraud when he came in from the East.[1]

3. But the trouble really goes far deeper still. To understand *how* deep it goes, think for a moment of all the stress that is laid in the Bible on 'Peace'—that habit of mind, that temper which is the exact opposite of worry and fuss and fret. Going straight to the heart of things, we know how central this emphasis on Peace is in the life and teaching of our Lord Himself. We hear it from the very first message which proclaimed His birth—the birth of the Prince of Peace—'Glory to God in the highest, on earth Peace.' It comes in His last charge to His disciples before His death—'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you.' It is the very first greeting which He gives to His disciples after His Resurrection. 'Jesus came and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. . . . Jesus therefore said again to them, Peace be unto you.' It plainly is among the very choicest gifts which even He, Conqueror over sin, death, and the grave, can give to them. Surely, then, it must, on all these grounds, be worth making a very great effort indeed to respond to this injunction of the Psalmist to put away worry and fret out of our lives, and live, more and more continually, in the shelter and strength of that 'Peace which passeth all understanding.'

4. How, then, can we hope to attain to this? Some answers to the question will occur to us at once. Some, of course, will say, 'It's all a matter of temperament. Some are born that way, and can take life easily. But that's not possible for me. I am a regular Martha. I always have taken things rather hard, and I know I always shall.' And perhaps amid the implied self-commiseration one detects an undernote of satisfaction that this is so, as meaning that, from another point of view, the speaker feels herself to be a really capable and energetic person, who, with whatever drawbacks, is worth very much more than the drone whose rôle it is to 'take life easily.'

Or one may say, 'It's a question of physical health—it's all very well, and very easy, to keep quiet and avoid worry and fret when one is in robust health and strength; but it's when one is run down and out of sorts that even little things get on the nerves, and the "grasshopper becomes a burden."'

[1] D. Crawford, *Back to the Long Grass*, 158.

Or once again, 'It's really for the most part a question of means. The man who has a good balance at the bank and is in a prosperous, flourishing condition, can very well afford to preach the duty of peace and quiet of mind, but when you haven't got that balance and can't for the life of you think how both ends are going to meet at the end of the month, it's a very different matter.'

Now, with regard to all answers of this sort, it is far best to be quite frank and to recognize that there really is a good deal of truth in them. It is undoubtedly very much easier for people of one sort of temperament, or under one set of conditions, to fight against this evil than for others. A naturally happy temperament, a sound digestion, a comfortable balance at the bank, the presence of those who are very near and dear—all these things and others like them are undoubtedly a great help, and it would be foolish and unreal to ignore this. Yet, if one thinks a little more about it, one cannot but feel that, after all, these are not the things that go deepest; these were certainly not the things that were in the minds of those who, either in the Old or New Testament, have laid such stress on the importance of being at peace within. Think of our Lord's circumstances, standing as He did already within the shadow of Gethsemane and Calvary, when He said, 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you.' Think of St. Paul when, from the depths of a Roman prison, he wrote of the 'peace of God which passeth all understanding.' Think of the prophets and Psalmists who, amid all the wild turbulence and lawlessness and disorder of those early days, could write so quietly and convincingly of that 'perfect peace' which comes from trusting in God, and of the immense importance of resisting the spirit of worry and fret.

No, it was certainly not a comfortable balance at the bank, or anything whatever connected with the outward circumstances of their life, that inspired the words in all these cases.

5. Where, then, should we look for the secret? We shall find it in the words of our Lord recorded in St. Matt. vi., where again and again He urges on His disciples not 'to be anxious' about outward things—food, raiment, and the like. Five times within the space of a few verses the word recurs, showing that this was a note, a characteristic, which in a very special degree He desired to see reproduced in those who were to be called by His Name. And note the reason which He gives for this freedom from worry and care. Is it because these things—'life,' 'raiment,' 'food,' 'stature'—don't matter? Not in the very least. You never get false spirituality of that kind in the Gospels. What then? There they are, all these needs—and very urgent they often are, too—and our Lord recognizes and admits this, and indeed makes this the very basis of His injunction of rest and peace. 'You do need these things,' He says; 'and, what's more, your heavenly Father *knows that you need them.*' There we touch the real secret; in that conviction, that we have indeed a Father in heaven, and that He who Himself has made us in the way in which we are made, with all these needs and points of difficulty, Himself is responsible for providing for them—in that conviction is the secret of such deep and true peace of the heart as we can know in no other way.

We know quite well that, as a simple matter of fact, this is the secret of the child-life, and of its freedom from worry and care. Why is it that the little life grows up and unfolds itself so free, so bright, so happy? Is it not simply because it is folded in the shelter of the parents' life, the parents' love, the parents' care? 'Oh, that'll be all right. Mother will see to that; father always manages about that'—are any notes of the true child life more invariable, more familiar, than the one which finds expression in some such words as these? Or are any dearer to the father's, the mother's heart? That happy childlike confidence, that perfect unwavering trust, that impossibility even to dream of things not coming all right when father and mother are there to see to them—are they not intensely precious, constituting, one may

almost say, the very essence of the relationship?

But if this is what we feel about our own children and what, above all else, we expect of them, what must it mean to Him, our Father in heaven, the very type and pattern of all Fatherhood, from whom every family ('all Fatherhood,' as it is in the Greek) in heaven and earth is named—what must it mean to Him to see us continually anxious and troubled about many things, overborne with care, fretting and fussing exactly as though we were orphans and had no one at our back to help us in all these things, or look after them for us? What must it mean to Him to see us going through the world, knowing nothing of the great principle of deep, true peace, and of all the best work which men can do, the principle of 'casting all your care on him, for he careth for you'? No one can ever describe or know, except by experience, the peace, the quiet strength, the power for the most solid, telling, steady work, which comes into the lives of those who have really anchored themselves on that rock. It was—we may say it with all reverence—the very central note of our Lord's own life, and it was that to which above all else He sought to bring all who would walk in His footsteps, as He points them, in the very opening words of the Prayer of all the ages, to 'Our Father which art in heaven,' who will assuredly give us from day to day our daily bread.[1]

With a true heart upheaving
My small load,
As thou appointest, Lord, so let me bear
The duty-burden trusted to my care.
And though my face should all be wet
With toilsome sweat;
Show Thou the road—
Enough! no grieving!

But now, my heart, be careful
Lest thou care!
The Lord doth give me daily bread for nought,
And for the morrow doth Himself take thought,
Then let me serve Him, on my part,
With all my heart,
And wait my share
With spirit prayerful.

Ah, Lord! now add Thy blessing
To all I do!
And let Thy grace and help my work attend,
From the beginning even to the end.
Let each day's burden teach my eyes,
My heart, to rise—
Thy rest pursue—
Thy peace possessing![1]

[1] George Alfred Lefroy.

The Way of Life.

Ps. xxxvii. 5.—'Commit thy way unto the Lord.'

THERE is no more familiar figure in the Bible than the figure of the road. We meet it everywhere. From end to end of the Book our life is compared to a way, a journey, which reveals every manner of changing circumstance as we step out toward the goal.

But not only in Scripture is the figure of the road a great favourite. It is also found in wider and more general literature. *The Pilgrim's Progress* is just the story of a road, and of the happenings which took place in it between the City of Darkness and the Home of Light. That little book, *The Roadmender*, so full of perfume and radiance, is just a series of refreshing meditations on the road as symbolic of the way of life. And so in a very wide literature our life is compared to a way, a road, which everybody travels, and it is for those travellers that many a Psalmist sings his counsel.

1. The way of life has a very changing gradient. Sometimes we come to a stiff climb where speed is out of the question. We are compelled to go slowly and to take our breath. And, as every good walker knows, one of the first essentials to easy climbing is a pair of good boots. One is all the better equipped if the boots are provided with nails that will

[1] *Sunday Afternoon Verses* (ed. W. R. Nicoll), 133.

grip. The nails prevent the slipping which adds so much to the toils of the journey, and which causes much unnecessary leakage of strength. And so it is when we come to the hilly districts in life. It is very essential, if we want to keep our footing, and to make headway in these precipitous paths, that our feet be shod with 'the preparedness of the gospel of peace.' There is nothing like this preparedness for enabling a man to stand in a difficult place. It does not matter how steep the hill may be, our feet will not slide if we are always shod with this readiness to do the will of our Lord.

2. And who does not know those seasons when the way of life comes to a stretch of dead level? There is nothing more tiring than a road that has no ups and downs. There is nothing more exhausting than the road which perpetually makes its demand on the same muscles, keeping them at work all the time. Now the same exaction is made on the soul that has to journey on a monotonous way. It is when we have few or no changes that our life is most severely strained. The Psalmist goes so far as to say that a life that is not troubled with changes may lose its hold upon God. 'Because they have no changes, they fear not God.' And therefore it is a matter of great urgency, when our life is proceeding along this kind of road, that we cultivate our communion with the Lord with special care and devotion. Nothing but the fellowship of God can take us safely along a road which does not offer the bracing vigour of mountain heights or the perfumed lilies of the vale.

¶ The very animals seem to know this weariness which comes from monotony. In *The Voyages of Captain Scott*, we read [1]: 'Already it seems to me that the dogs feel the monotony of a long march over the snow more than we do; they seem easily to get dispirited, and that it is not due to fatigue is shown when they catch a glimpse of anything novel. . . . To-day, for instance, they required some driving until they caught sight of the depôt flag, when they gave tongue loudly and dashed off as though they barely felt the load behind them.'

[1] p. 108.

3. And then there is that part of the road where it begins to decline. There are some travellers who think that the descent is even more trying than the climb. Certainly coming down a mountain is more wearying than going up. And in the way of life it is a very rare attainment to know how to decline. When our powers have lost their primary strength, when, as we say, our best days are behind us, when we have to turn to smaller ministries and be contented with lesser issues, there is a great demand upon the resources of faith and love. When the ageing minister finds his popularity declining, when he sees the crowds leaving him for another, when there are empty places in the pews that used to be filled, when there is evidence that he is going down the hill, he has great need of multiplied powers of grace. There is nothing more suggestive of strength and grace in the life of John the Baptist than his attitude when his disciples came to him telling him that Jesus, whom he had baptized beyond Jordan, had begun His public ministry, and that all men were coming to Him. John the Baptist replied with a calmness and sanity born of a great faith: 'He must increase, but I must decrease!' That was a great spiritual triumph. It meant that John the Baptist knew how to go down the hill without slipping; and we can depend upon it that John the Baptist found those lilies of peace which, John Bunyan tells us, grow in the Valley of Humiliation.

4. In the way of life we sometimes come to conditions where we have to walk without the inspiration of large vision. We are not able to see 'the distant scene' and we have to be satisfied with the inspiration and guidance of the single step. But it is wise for us to remember that when we are thus shut in by our Lord we are not to interpret the confinement as though no progress could be made. Perhaps we are growing in the apparent

restraint. Perhaps we shall be all the more ready for the next vision because of our temporary confinement. Perhaps our powers are being prepared for finer prospects through the discipline of a narrow way. Perhaps to-morrow we shall have greater capacity for enjoyment because of our temporary deprivations. Every traveller knows when he has been shut in for a time, and the road suddenly opens upon some grand panorama, how his heart leaps to the fresh surprise with a great and exhilarating joy. And so it surely is in the province of our God. Our very restraints are the provisions of grace, and we are shut in only that to-morrow we may be able to take the longer view.

5. Sometimes there are rivers to cross, and the anticipation fills us with fear. There seems to be no bridge and we do not know how we shall get across. Let us encourage our hearts and be assured that the Lord of the way has made all preparations, and when we get to the river we shall find the stepping-stones across. And when we come to the last river, to the stream which we call death, we shall find that even there the provision is not wanting, and the pilgrim will quietly continue his journey as though no waters rolled between. 'When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee.' Therefore, let us commit our way unto the Lord. The Lord of the way is the companion of the pilgrims who are travelling toward his home. He does not remain in his house awaiting the pilgrim's arrival at his gate. He comes out to meet us. Nay, He begins the journey with us as soon as we begin! And He will walk with us every step of the way. Let us cultivate the sense of His presence, and the comfort of His companionship, and the pilgrim road will be found to be the highway of our God, filled with all sorts of loving ministries which He has provided for every pilgrim who is travelling from darkness into light, and from exile unto home.[1]

[1] J. H. Jowett.

Lead us, O Father, in the paths of right:
Blindly we stumble when we walk alone,
Involved in shadows of a darkening night;
Only with Thee we journey safely on.

Lead us, O Father, to Thy heavenly rest,
However rough and steep the pathway be,
Through joy or sorrow, as Thou deemest best,
Until our lives are perfected in Thee.[1]

The Secret of Rest.

Ps. xxxvii. 7.—'Rest in the Lord.'

'A MUSICAL thought,' says Thomas Carlyle, 'is one spoken by a mind that has penetrated into the inmost heart of the thing; detected the inmost mystery of it, namely, the melody that lies hidden in it, the inward harmony of coherence which is its soul whereby it exists and has a right to be here in this world. All inmost things, we may say, are melodious, naturally utter themselves in song. All deep things are song. It seems somehow the very central essence of us. See deep enough, and you see musically; the heart of Nature being everywhere music if we could only reach it.' The Psalmists did reach it, and expressed their religion in song. They turned the statutes of the Law into the songs of the sanctuary. This text is a musical thought that can cheer lonely hearts and quicken the slow steps of the weary.

To rest in God involves three things.

1. *Knowledge of God.*—Ignorance of God is at the bottom of our unbelief and unrest. We apprehend but a small part of what it is possible for us to know about Him, and we judge Him by that small part. If God were simply what He seems to some, the supreme King, working all things after the counsel of His own will, 'glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders,' making all accomplish His pleasure, and using all for the advancement of His glory—if that were God, and not what it really is, only a part of God, and a part which, taken by itself, misrepre-

[1] W. H. Burleigh.

sents God, we could not 'rest in the Lord.' We might bow with reverent homage at His feet, we might accept His will and obey His voice from a sense of duty, but rest in Him we could not. 'My father's at the helm,' said the captain's child in the storm, the explanation to her wondering fellow passengers of hers being the only fearless heart on board the ship. It makes all the difference whether we can say simply 'The Captain is at the helm,' or add 'The Captain is my Father.' In the one case there will be a natural fear, in the other a calm trust. God is infinitely righteous, the supreme sovereign, the ineffably holy One, but behind the sceptre of the King is the heart of the Father; the ruling motive of omnipotence is the love which, so loved the world that it gave His only begotten Son.

¶ I have had many sorrows, and though I am not of sanguine disposition, life has been a joy to me, and is so still. Two great beliefs give me rest from the worry and dissatisfaction which torment so many: (1) that God is a Person. I cannot define the specific sense in which He is a Person; and (2) that God is *Love*. He *must* be love. An Agnostic will confess that if there be a Creator He must at least be the equal of His highest creation. It is a logical absurdity to say that any creature can love more than God loves. If, therefore, there is anything in creation that I cannot harmonize with love, it is because of my limited faculties. All must be right. When this, the great burden of Bible teaching, is heartily received, how much of perplexity and pain is taken out of the life![1]

2. *Submission to God.*—Probably this points to the greatest hindrance to a life of Rest. The reason why we cannot confide in God is that we are not conscious of having submitted ourselves to Him. There have been times with most of us when we have gone forward to meet difficulty fearlessly, because of the conviction that God was calling us in that direction, and we knew well that what He had called us to He would deliver us in, and help us to perform. It is common to hear Christians say that the trials that come from man are hard to bear, but that those are comparatively easy of which they can say 'It is the Lord.' This is what we want to import into the whole of our life. A continuous rest can be had if we are willing to pay the price for it—the price of seeing, as it has been said, 'that our whole life is lived within the will of God.' There must be the complete submission of ourselves, our plans, our desires, our affairs to Him.

¶ Hanging-lamps of silver and other metals are made with such skill, and are fastened so cleverly at the joints, that wherever and however they are carried they are never upset, but always remain lighted, and always look up towards the sky; and whoever is truly devoted to the Divine Will is like a lamp of this kind, for, however roughly and improperly he is handled, he still looks towards God and the Divine Will, always standing upright before His Maker, to Whom he frequently offers himself thus: 'If Thou willest, O Lord, that my body should be worn out and feeble, or if Thou willest that I should be a living corpse, deprived of all strength, wasting away with disease, afflicted with pains, or confined for years to my bed, behold, I am ready and prepared! If it so please Thee, even the most weary sickness will be more pleasing to me than health, however lasting: and it will be equally my pleasure either to be well, according to Thy Will, or to fall into sickness, and to give thanks for it.' John Avila used to say, that it avails more to thank God once in time of tribulation, than six thousand times in prosperity. For most people know how to thank God when it goes well with them, but few indeed in adversity.[1]

3. *Reliance on God.*—He has invited us to commit our way unto the Lord, to roll our burden upon Him, to cast all our care upon Him, to be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication to make our

[1] *John Brash*, 70.

[1] Drexelius.

requests known unto God. And we fulfil our text when we fulfil those words. A certain church, says a minister, had to be rebuilt, and the burden of rebuilding fell more largely than in some cases on the pastor, a heavy burden it was, it pressed on him by day and night; at length a voice sounded in his ears—a voice from on high—saying, 'Give Me your Church,' and the worn-out burden-bearer obeyed, and 'the work of righteousness was peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance.' Give Me your difficulty, God says to His people; give Me your domestic care; give Me your business anxiety; give Me your Sunday-school class; give Me your trouble about your health. And when we have given it to Him, and know that (according to His word) He has graciously taken it, and that we, therefore, have to bear it no more, that we have simply to watch for the indications of His will, and do what He bids, and calmly look out for 'the salvation of the Lord'; we may say, with Tholuck, 'Lord, all the burden of this care I cast on Thee, as Thou hast told me to do, and now, therefore, the matter is in Thy hands.'

When the world's weight is on thy mind,
And all its black-winged fears affright,
Think how the daisy draws her blind,
And sleeps without a light.[1]

Rest and Activity.

Ps. xxxvii. 7, 4.—'Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him. He shall give thee the desires of thine heart.'

THESE gracious words have been made twice familiar by the music of Mendelssohn's *Elijah*. The story of the prophet is known even to those who have ceased to read their Bibles. The words of the text are in the oratorio put into the mouth of the visiting angel. Such, indeed, is the message the angels bring to those who are weary in well-doing: 'Rest: be patient; fret not yourself because of evil-doers. God in His own time will do what you in your time have not been able to do.'

[1] F. Langbridge, *Little Tapers*, 13.

1. Sloth and restlessness are the Scylla and Charybdis of the Church militant. They both result from forgetting the secret and source of spiritual power. Restlessness is the sin of the enthusiast. He looks for the Kingdom and is impatient that it comes so slowly. Just because he feels deeply the fact of evil, and realizes that the number of evil-doers is very large, he cannot help fretting. His very zeal makes him over-anxious and over-active. So in the Church we multiply machinery; we add organization to organization; our voices get throaty with much speaking; our bodies and souls weary with much doing; even our love begins to get official and mechanical; and when we think of the results of all this effort, they are rather meagre—for the mass of people seem apathetic—and the thought makes us more tired still.

There are Churches and societies and individuals to-day who are inclined to the fault which golfers know as 'over-pressing.' In their keenness they try to hit the ball too hard, with the result that it does not travel so well as it would have done if their swing had been true and easy. In other words, they would do more if they did less.

2. But the cause of failure to capture the Kingdom by force of organization and activity goes deeper. In their keenness and enthusiasm men begin to think that success depends on their own efforts; that God can act only through them and the big battalions which they muster. 'Our job,' say they, 'is to bring in the Kingdom.' They even begin to think that God does not know the needs of the world unless they keep Him supplied with accurate information. Intercessions, instead of being said to the accompaniment of the thought, 'Thy will be done—Thy will is good,' are said in the tone of 'Up, Lord, why sleepest Thou? Awake'—which is merely impertinent and foolish.

The spirit of restlessness—and we must recognize that much in modern life, especially since the war, accentuates it—has penetrated far into our lives. It has entered into our prayers, public and private, and has robbed

them of much of their fruitfulness. In the presence of God, too often we do all the talking. Our prayers are nearly all begging letters. And our praise, when we praise, is garrulous and patronizing. We pray as though we could save ourselves by much speaking. Consequently, prayer does not bring the strength it should bring and we are tempted to cut short our prayers, and instead add to our good works. But 'it is in returning and rest that we are saved.' It is those who are still in the presence of God that come to know Him; it is those who wait upon Him that renew their strength. The experience of prophet and psalmist is confirmed by the Christian saint. It is the quieting of ourselves in God, moments when we allow the thought of God to occupy our mind and await His guiding and listen for His voice—it is these habits and experiences that bring refreshment to the soul. Quite apart from the sense of guiding which makes a good Quaker meeting so impressive, or the mystical experience of hearing an interior voice, there is real strength to be gained through the discipline of holding ourselves still in the presence of God. It may be a passivity which is intensely active, bearing much fruit in action. Our souls are under-nourished. The important thing in prayer is not what we say to God but what He says to us. And only too often we do not listen. And so we deprive ourselves of the most certain source of refreshment and renewal.

And modern psychology confirms the experience of psalmist, prophet, and saint. 'Repose in God,' a well-known psychologist has written, 'is the secret of power.' Psychology also provides a scientific explanation of why it should be so. It has shown that a man is normally aware of the working of only a small portion of his mind. It divides the mind into the conscious mind, the fore-conscious, and the unconscious or sub-conscious mind. In the routine business of daily life it is the conscious mind which is occupied; the fore-conscious mind is the seat of the imaginative and contemplative faculties. Poems and music, prayers and visions take their rise there. It is there that great enterprises are first conceived. It is there that God meets a man. With the majority of men and women to-day the fore-conscious part of the mind is not given enough to do. They employ as it were only the topmost layer of their minds. The deeper reaches of the mind are ignored and unknown. And so God is unreal to them. They may know about Him; but they do not know Him. The dynamic springs of spiritual power are untapped. And this neglect, disastrous at any time, is the more disastrous in an age like the present. For it is an age of thought, which sets before us a material cosmos, vast beyond all imagining, overwhelming, immense. And it is also an age of commercialism, in which it is easy to forget spiritual values. In such an environment the primary function of the Church is to make God real; to demonstrate the existence of spiritual values; to reveal His love; to lead men into the friendship of Christ; to cultivate and deepen the worshipful spirit in them. Worship is just that sense of awe and reverence, the sense of looking to and waiting upon God, which comes to men in the silent hour.

'Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him. He shall give thee the desires of thine heart.' These words have been a rock of refuge to many a soul when life has been hard. To the aged and dying, to the sick and sorrowing, they have been rich in consolation. And they also speak to the young and healthy and active. Indeed, they are specially addressed to them. As the years pass the experience of life will teach the truth to those who live wisely. But it is a hard truth for the young. When we are full of strength and vision, and have the desire to serve, we are apt to put our whole trust in these impulses. And we have to learn that our virility, service, and idealism are useless, if we have not faith in God, and if we do not find strength and guidance from Him. 'Rest in the Lord.' The words remind us that works without faith are barren, and recall us to the indispensable condition of all true and creative life and work.[1]

[1] A. G. Hunter.

Keep your Temper.

Ps. xxxvii. 8.—'Fret not thyself.'

THREE times within the first eight verses of this Psalm the Psalmist utters his refrain, 'Fret not thyself—fret not thyself—fret not thyself,' adding the last time that to fret oneself will only make one do what is wrong. It is one of the chief Old Testament passages on the duty of keeping one's temper. 'Fret not thyself at the ungodly' means, Do not lose your temper at the unsatisfactory state of mortal affairs, in particular because there are bad men who do you wrong, and yet seem very prosperous. 'Keep your temper,' says this good man of far-away times. It is what we all wish to be able to do, and find rather hard. Let us see if this good man of old can help us.

1. 'Fret not thyself, else shalt thou be moved to do evil.' He seems to rest the duty of keeping your temper upon a prudential consideration. It is a mistake to lose your temper, because it will lead you to do the wrong thing; you will make blunders in your heat and haste, you will speak intemperate words, which presently will prove embarrassing to you; you will be tempted to violence which will put you on the wrong side of the law, or at least provoke your adversaries to reprisals. That is not all that the Psalmist thinks; the consideration is perhaps only incidental, something by the way; but it is a valuable consideration, and one which the modern wisdom will re-echo.

But no virtue is well based upon considerations of prudence only. The prudent thought that if we are not good-tempered we shall make mistakes and get into trouble is not a powerless consideration. It does a great deal, no doubt. Most men of business, and public servants in government offices, whatever they may be at home and in their own families, contrive to be very courteous, pleasant, long-suffering, and reluctant to take offence, when they deal with strangers in their offices and their houses of business. The reason is that they know that ill-temper and quarrelling hinder good business, and make trouble and loss for those who indulge in it. Let us, then, not deny the force of the Psalmist's reason, that ill-temper moves a man to do evil. Yet do not let us be satisfied with it. For Christians it is not enough. Our righteousness in the matter of temper must exceed the righteousness of the polite Civil servant. We must command ourselves, not because of the inconvenience of bad temper, but because bad temper is bad.

2. Why is it bad? Why should a Christian, as Christian, avoid it? Because ill-temper is a form of selfishness, and also a form of weakness. That is just what many people do not think it. They do not think it selfish; they think it is some natural or, as the phrase goes, constitutional peculiarity; that men are born that way; that it is a natural quality, like, let us say, a mercurial or a phlegmatic temperament, a florid or a sallow complexion. Of course, if it were, it would seem very excusable. But it is not so. Bad temper is simply a form of selfishness. For what are the things that make people lose their temper? Either the person wants something for himself, and cannot get it, and he thereupon flies in a rage:—that is greed, and greed, of course, is selfish; or he is not treated with as much respect or honour as he thinks he ought to have, and he sulks:—that is pride, and pride is selfishness; or he is opposed and contradicted in some purpose of his, and he fumes at it, and refuses to have anything more to do with the people who will not do exactly what he thinks best:—that is wilfulness and self-will, and surely self-will is selfish. Here are the main causes of ill-temper, and in all of them the reason why the man fumes, or sulks, or rages is because he cares too much about himself, and not enough about other people, that is, because he is selfish. And if anyone reminds us that some people, not specially selfish, yet have a bad temper, through illness or nervous irritability, we answer this

is true, but it only means that in their case the temptation to be selfish is very much greater than it is with us who are not ill and have not nerves which are irritable; and that we who lose our temper, say, once in three months, may be far more to blame than the tempted ones who are cross every week.

¶ His temper had been ungovernable from his childhood; he had the irritability of a dyspeptic man of genius; and when the Devil, as he called it, had possession of him, those whose comfort he ought most to have studied were the most exposed to the storm: he who preached so wisely 'on doing the duty which lay nearest to us,' forgot his own instructions, and made no adequate effort to cast the Devil out. Nay, more: there broke upon him in his late years, like a flash of lightning from heaven, the terrible revelation that he had sacrificed his wife's health and happiness in his absorption in his work; that he had been oblivious of his most obvious obligations, and had been negligent, inconsiderate, and selfish. The fault was grave and the remorse agonising. For many years after she had left him, when we passed the spot in our walks where she was last seen alive, he would bare his grey head in the wind and rain—his features wrung with unavailing sorrow. Let all this be acknowledged; and let those who know themselves to be without either these sins, or others as bad as these, freely cast stones at Carlyle.[1]

3. And then bad temper is also a form of weakness. This will be heartily disbelieved. A bad-tempered person fancies it is his strength and force which make him so. He prides himself on the manly spirit that will not put up with slights, that is impatient with the folly and bungling and slowness of incompetent people; he feels that he is never more magnificent than when he is in a rage. Did not someone or other say that bad temper is merely a form of energy? Just what he feels is the case! His temper is a form of his energy. Well it is a form of energy in the sense in which the sparks that fly from a smith's hammer, and the bang that gives the blows, are the energy of the blows it strikes; but the sparks do not swing the hammer, nor do they forge the horse-shoe, nor are they any use at all. And just so, though some energetic people have quick tempers, it is not the sparkle or the noise of their temper that does their work, and that work is not done any the better for these, but always a little the worse.

It is not meant that people ought never to be angry. There is a place and a use for anger, there are times when impatience with others is almost wholesome and stimulating, times when indignation at wrong-doing is a duty and an urgent one, times when we can be angry and sin not, and when it would be sin not to be angry. There is a wrath of man which does work the righteousness of God. But anger of this kind is not losing one's temper; on the contrary, it is a noble and beautiful and helpful command of temper, a using it at the right time, when it is of use, one which is by no means specially exhibited by those who are given to 'losing temper.' No, 'losing the temper' is a phrase which means what it says; it is losing something; it is the incontinence which cannot restrain self, the leakiness which cannot hold an impulse in, but lets it break out, the weak hand which cannot keep its grasp on the lower nature in us, but lets the chained wild beast loose to do mischief. If there is any meaning in the words 'weak' and 'strong' then bad temper is a form of human weakness, and those who would be the strong will meditate the proverb, 'He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.'

¶ Take a high-souled man who is injured or insulted by his fellow. How will he act? What will be here the next thing? The natural reaction, the instinctive movement will be one of revolt, of paying back in like coin. That lies nearest to the animal in him, and he feels it all. But will it determine his action? Will that actually come next? There is a beautiful story which D'Aguesseau, a French Advocate-General of the seventeenth century, tells of his father: 'Naturally of a quick temper,' his son

[1] J. A. Froude, *Thomas Carlyle*, 1795-1835, ii. 471.

says of him, 'when under provocation one saw him redden and become silent at the same moment; the nobler part of his soul allowing the first fire to pass without word said, in order to re-establish straightway that inner calm and tranquillity which reason and religion had combined to make the habit of his soul.' There you have the thing taken from the life; the trained soul caught in the entire fineness of its action. The whole philosophy of the spirit is there; the higher nature constructing its next thing, not from the grosser impulses, but from the free obedience it pays to the highest that is in it.[1]

Order.

Ps. xxxvii. 23.—'The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord.'

One of the most remarkable things about life is the consciousness we have that it is ordered. There are no gaps except in our knowledge. In Nature we behold processes moving to the accomplishment of purpose. It is development, order. The glory of modern science has been the discovery of the orderliness of the universe. Where the thinkers of other days saw interruptions, cross-purposes and chance, their children see symmetry, order and design. The dominating idea of our time in reference to the material world has come prominently into our conception of human life. Great characters have been filled with the consciousness that their lives were ordered by a power outside themselves, that their destiny had been chosen for them. Lord Morley says that Mr. Gladstone often expressed the thought that he was an instrument for the achievement of purposes designed by a Higher Power. Other leaders of men have made the same confession. Our Lord and Master Himself said: 'To this end was I born, and for this purpose came I into the world.' We cannot get away from the haunting thought that life is controlled; and our power of choice, while it is real, is not the only factor that determines our actions. Happy are they who, with the Psalmist's faith in God, catch the music of the thought that the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord. He is not left in the trackless forest without a guide, or doomed to struggle in the darkness without a kindly light; he is not orphaned in the world without a loving hand to aid. His Father, unseen but not unknown, has prepared the path, and somehow guides the steps of those who commit their way unto Him.

1. The presence of the Divine order is attested by consciousness. We rebel at the idea that life is a chaos or disorder. All that we know of it in other spheres compels us to recognize its orderliness. It is a process of cause and effect. There is a sequence and continuity. Intelligence hates haphazard and seeks to eliminate chance. We somehow feel that life ought to be orderly, that it should not be left to the accident of circumstance, or the by-play of forces without intelligent control. If the mechanic exerts himself to superintend his work, and the engineer puts all his thought into the control of the mechanism he creates, and the statesman seeks to make government so perfect a machine that it acts without break or disruption, we feel that in the great affairs of life beyond our control there must be some Power to order. Human life may be a rebellion, but in its obedience it is a harmony.

¶ There is in every bit of life, noble or ignoble, beautiful or repulsive, great or small, traces of a thought, evidences of an order, lines of design. Every bit of life is a bit of revelation; it brings us face to face with the great mystery and the great secret. In every such disclosure we are not only looking at ourselves, but we are catching a glimpse of God.[1]

2. It is also confirmed by experience. The only explanation of our experiences is in the belief that life is ordered by the Lord. Our theology must be wrought out of our experience. We cannot tell why events come with-

[1] J. Brierley, *Religion and To-day*, 143.

[1] H. W. Mabie, *Essays on Nature and Culture*, 158.

out our bidding and change everything; why we were born, as we were, without our choice. We came upon the great adventure of life from the Palace of the Unborn without any consent upon our part, and much of the path we have travelled for reasons we could not explain; but faith looks out with clear vision, and sees that in all things there has been the mercy of the Lord that did not leave us to ourselves, and that in the time of need was particularly manifest, though in our blindness we saw it not. As we go up the hill, with the lights behind us, we see only the shadows; but as we look back we see the path illuminated, and we know that He led us by the right way. This is the faith of all the pilgrims whose experience and confessions are recorded in the Scriptures. Let it be our faith, for it is the only explanation that gives meaning, and dignity to life. Life was not meant to be a child's riddle, a Chinese puzzle, to which there is no solution. It must have some meaning, if intelligence is seated on the throne of the Universe. Our life was not meant to be an experiment that comes to nothing.

3. No doubt life always presents an alternative. There is a higher and a lower. We are conscious that we could turn aside. The Children of Israel during the wilderness experiences always had the alternative of going back to Egypt, and in our consciousness we know that we can turn aside from the right. We are not compelled to do the duty that is clear to our vision. If we transgress we turn aside from the ordered path. Sin is rebellion against order; it introduces discord. Disobedience is a violation of the harmony of life. There is much that God permits that He does not sanction. If we insist upon taking the downward course, our Father in sorrow permits us to go our way. But He does not sanction it. And some day we shall discover that there was no approval given to our actions, but on the contrary, the displeasure of God came upon us because of disobedience. We do many things without reference to His will. He allows us this freedom; but there is no sanction, there cannot be. That would involve approval, and God, while He consents, does not approve. Through the tangle of life we shall find that God's purpose has ever been to bring man into harmony with Himself.

¶ The old builders of Venice managed to run a red line through all the pavements to the principal square where the great Cathedral stands, so that the traveller knew that he was following the path that led to the house of God. Our way has not been without indication. Those who have sought, have found. God has not left us to guess at the path our feet should take. Duty is clear to those who wish to do it, and the way of holiness is revealed to all who seek to follow it. Jesus our Master is the revelation of God. He speaks the word with power by which we may avoid the failure that comes to those who miss the Divine order.[1]

4. The life that is ordered for us may not be quite what we wish or what we expect. There is an originality of experience. The order unfolds itself a step at a time. It will be made clear to the one who should take it. Nobody else may see, just as no other soul can decide, for me. The Father's plan for my life is not published; it is privately communicated. My inclinations may be in other directions; I may love the soft seat and the forbidden fruits, but failure is always the end of self-gratification. There may be a message in the lines:—

I heard a voice say unto me, [witty
Nor since thou art neither beautiful nor
It is vain that thou hangest about
The doors of the admired palaces.
For thou wilt not gain admission there.
But here outside is a plot of waste ground,
Where thou canst build a little
Cabin all thine own.
And since it is close by the common road
And there is no fence about it, [heat
Many a weary traveller parched with the
Of the day shall turn in unto thee
For a cup of cold water—
And that shall suffice for thy life.

[1] J. C. Carlile.

This is the joy we may have, that, though the path be rough and long, it is the right path. There is no failure for those who follow the Lord. Let us cultivate that sensitiveness of spirit which comes to those who depend upon the prompting of the Holy Spirit so that we may be responsive and may not seek for ourselves, but ever pray, 'Choose Thou the path for me.'

Old Age.

Ps. xxxvii. 37.—'Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end (RV 'latter end') of that man is peace.'

'CALL no man happy until he dies' was the saying of the ancient sage. It is well to refrain from passing final judgments or pronouncements on any life until it is lived through. 'Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright'—take note of his life in its beginnings, watch the progress of his career—but do not finally make up your mind about him till you have observed how he finishes: 'the end of that man is peace.' Many a dark and cloudy day he may have had, but on his dying day the sun shines out; the storms have blown over, and there is a great calm.

1. The first condition of happy, beautiful age, is hard work—to take hold of something in life and do it with a will—do it so as to get honestly tired over it. It hardly matters what it is—the merchant's business, the scholar's study, the work of the teacher, the duty of the citizen, the patient labours of the philanthropist or the minister. Let us work with all our might, keep patiently at it, year after year, face life's difficulties and discouragements, and still hold on—and then, when old age comes we shall be ready for it, we shall feel a wholesome tiredness, a willingness to slacken off and let others take their turn. We shall feel the restfulness of old age. There is a mighty beneficence in hard, earnest work.

¶ 'There is a man who was boasting to me yesterday that he has never done a stroke of work in his life,' said a guest at a summer hotel—himself a hard worker, taking a well-earned rest. The man to whom he pointed was delicate-looking, querulous, old before his time. Poor fellow! He was a millionaire, who thought he did not need to work. It did not occur to him that he owed it to the world to do something more than live on his income. His parents had not been as wise as the fathers of many sons who are heirs to fortunes. In consequence, he had been living a life of self-indulgence. Everything had lost its zest; he could have almost everything he wanted, without an effort. The days were monotonous. In the morning he longed for evening; in the evening he wished for the morning.

Next day acquaintances sought him in vain. When several days passed without his reappearance, the physician who was seen coming from his room was asked if his patient was seriously ailing.

'There is no reason to be alarmed,' was the disgusted answer. 'He is merely spending a week in bed because of utter weariness, caused by doing nothing. What he needs is some good, hard work to take his mind from himself.'[1]

2. The second condition of happy age is that we must have lived not selfishly, but thinking of others, helping others, finding our happiness in others. Of all things in life, the character that becomes most utterly wretched in old age is the selfish one. It is a poor thing to be everlastingly thinking about oneself while life is in its youth and strength. Still there is no denying that there is a certain satisfaction to be got out of selfishness in youth! There are pleasures that 'self' can concern itself with then, not the highest pleasures perhaps, but still pleasures after a kind. But as life draws on towards age, if we have got into the way of thinking only about 'self,' we have to think of self more than ever, but there is no more pleasure to be got out of it! Selfishness in youth may mean thinking about pleasures, but selfishness in age means thinking about aches and pains. No careful thought for self can

[1] J. T. Faris, *Making Good*, 163.

ward off these; and we are left with the miserable habit of thinking—thinking—of self, and more and more it is aches and pains, and disappointments, and troubles, and grumbles that such thinking has to feed upon.

¶ Let us look on a portrait of ideal old age as drawn by A. C. Benson.

There has been staying with me for the last few days a perfectly delightful person; an old man—he is nearly eighty—who is exactly what an old man ought to be, and what one would desire to be if one were to grow old. He is infirm, but not ill; he is infinitely courteous and gracious, grateful for the smallest kindness, determined not to interfere with anyone's convenience. My servants simply adore him, welcome him like an angel, and see him depart with tears. He knows all about them, and keeps all the details of their families in his mind. He never talks of himself, but has a perfectly genuine and unaffected interest in other people. He is endlessly tolerant and sweet-tempered; and sometimes will drop a little sweet and mellow maxim, the ripest fruit of sunny experience. One feels in his presence that this is what life is meant to do for us all, if it were not for the strange admixture of irritabilities and selfishness, so natural and yet so ugly, which lie in wait for so many of us. One of the most beautiful things about him is his tenderness. He talks of his old friends who have taken their departure before him with a perfect simplicity, while I have seen the tears gather and suddenly overbrim his eyes. He seems to have no personal regrets or hopes; but to have transferred them all to other people. Yet he does not keep his friends in mind in a professional way as a matter of duty; his thoughts are simply full of them. He does no work, writes few letters, reads a little; he sometimes smilingly accuses himself of being lazy; and yet his presence and his unconscious sweetness are the most powerful influence for good I have ever seen. He makes it appear unreasonable and silly to fret or fuss or fume; and yet he is shrewd and humorous, and enjoys the display of human weaknesses. He is never shocked at anything, nor ashamed of anyone. He likes people to follow their bent and to do things in their own way. He never seems in the way; he loves to have children about him, and they talk to him as they talk to each other. One has no sense of rigid morality or righteousness in his presence; it only seems the most beautiful thing in the world to be good and kind, as well as the easiest.[1]

3. The last element of the life that brings happy age is an earnest part in the great truths and thoughts of religion. Everyone feels that this is a beautiful thing in age, but if it is to be really beautiful and helpful to us then, it must be not something taken up then, but something that has grown up with our growth, and had part in our strong, eager years of life and work. Let us remember our Creator in the day of our youth! not merely believe in Him, but 'remember' Him—think of Him, own Him in our life. While our life and nature are plastic, while our hearts are fresh, let us look up to the Infinite Presence with an earnest purpose to live in His great world, not idly or carelessly; and with a worshipping heart as well as busy hands. Now, while our senses are clear to see, to hear, the finer glory of His world, let us watch for those finer lights, listen to those deeper tones of meaning and suggestion which are something more than colour or sound, which are the witness of the higher life in the universe to the higher life in ourselves. If we do not watch for these deeper things now, the time will come when we shall not be able to find them. The time will come when we shall look on a glorious sunset and see nothing but colours—colours; and listen to the voices of Nature and hear nothing but various, meaningless sounds. If we make that deeper meaning ours now, it will not pass away; it will grow clearer and clearer until, as life grows onwards, the smallest ray of sunshine shall glisten with a holy beauty, and the common sounds of Nature touch our heart as undertones of God! Let us be able to say with the poet—

[1] A. C. Benson, *The Silent Isle*, 286.

A solemn hush is brooding o'er the moor,
The stars are stealing through the door,
The light that's left of day is nearly o'er,
Ere I am home.

The moor-tracks wind into the pathless night
Till they are lost at last upon the height;
But in the west there lingers all the light
To see me home.

Justice in the End.

Ps. xxxvii. 38.—'The end of the wicked shall be cut off.'

The principle stated in the text is that righteousness succeeds ultimately, while unrighteousness eventually fails and comes to naught. This principle represents a deep-rooted instinct of our human nature. We have a feeling that the very universe itself is for good and against evil. We may not be able to prove it, but deep down in the depth of our being we feel that it is so. Our conscience declares it. Our moral sense affirms it. It is an intuition of the soul. It is a presentiment of the human spirit. And it voices itself alike in homely maxims and proverbs and in the carefully-worded utterances of our best and wisest thinkers. Take the following as examples:—'Honesty is the best policy.' 'Great is truth and must prevail.' 'You cannot do wrong without suffering wrong.' 'The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small.' 'Justice is the rhyme of things.' 'No good thing is failure, no evil thing success.' 'Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith let us to the end do our duty as we understand it.' Underlying all these sayings is the instinctive conviction that the universe at bottom is a moral universe, that things have been so arranged that goodness involves blessedness, while wickedness issues inevitably in defeat, disaster, bankruptcy and ruin.

This verdict of the soul is confirmed and ratified by religion. For religion, of course, assures us that there exists behind the universe a 'Moral Governor,' in Butler's phrase, or, as Matthew Arnold puts it, 'a Power not ourselves that makes for righteousness.' Hence the order of the universe reflects the mind and will of an all-holy God, and the laws of the universe express the working of a Lord who loves righteousness and hates iniquity, and who has sworn to do battle with evil and to destroy it. In a world thus divinely organized, how is it possible for sin to prosper? 'O my brothers, God exists,' cries Emerson. 'There is a soul at the centre of Nature, and over the will of every man, so that none of us can wrong the universe.'

¶ That principle has been illustrated from time to time, and very dramatically illustrated, by events and incidents of history. Think, for example, of 'the Invincible Armada,' sailing out in all its pride to overthrow the religion and crush the liberties of England. What happened? Did not the very elements combine with Drake and Howard to shatter and smash that wicked enterprise? Out of one hundred and thirty magnificent vessels only fifty-four returned to Spain. And it was God, the righteous God—so Englishmen believed—who had accomplished the work of destruction. *Deus flavit et dissipati sunt*,—that was the sentence inscribed upon the medal which Elizabeth struck to commemorate the great deliverance—'God blew on them, and they were scattered.' Or think again of Napoleon obstinately bent on invading Russia, turning away from all remonstrances and challenging God Himself with the insufferably insolent words, 'I propose and I dispose.' And then recollect how an unusually early winter upset all his calculations. What caused that early winter, with its fearful cold and blinding snow? What stirred up the forces of Nature to confound the would-be conqueror's ambitious and nefarious projects? Napoleon knew. 'God Almighty,' he exclaimed, 'has been too much for me!'[1]

Such instances seem to corroborate that principle which is both instinctively affirmed by the unsophisticated conscience and attested by the solemn witness of Divine Revelation—that in the universe, as it is constituted, evil

[1] F. H. Dudden.

lives a precarious life. The very nature of things is against it. It cannot last long. It cannot persist. Its doom is sealed. The end may be postponed, indeed, yet, inasmuch as the world is a moral world and is ruled by a 'Moral Governor,' the end is absolutely certain. 'The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous; but the way of the ungodly shall perish.'

But why have we to wait until the end? There are certain laws of the Divine working which seem to throw some light upon this difficulty of the delay.

1. God does not destroy evil until evil is ripe for destruction. God is never premature. God is never in a hurry. God never acts before the time. God waits to destroy evil until evil has come to maturity. The tares of the devil are sown broadcast in the harvest-field, but God does not rashly uproot the tares. He leaves them to grow; He permits them to come up; He lets them develop to perfection; then at last He makes away with them. Again, an evil tree brings forth evil fruit, but a wise and long-suffering Providence does not make haste to shake the branches. God allows the fruit to ripen; He even gives it rain and sunshine in order that it may ripen; presently when the fruit is fully ripe, it falls. God is pledged to destroy evil, but He is not pledged to destroy it before the proper time; and the proper time is only when evil has ripened and come to a head and is consummately ready for destruction.

Frequently we observe an exemplification of this law even in the individual life. An evil man determines to take his evil way, and God suffers him to take it. God allows him a free run. The course is clear, and he can go ahead, and there is apparently nothing to stop him. He does worse and worse, but nobody pulls him up. He becomes worse and worse, but there is no sign of impending judgment. At last he has filled to the brim the measure of iniquity, and that moment is the end. The storm bursts suddenly; the crash of doom startles the quiet air; the lightning flashes, and the man is smitten down. 'I,' cries the Psalmist, 'have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not. Yea, I sought him, but he could not be found.' And what we observe sometimes in the case of the individual, we observe always and invariably in the case of a society or nation. God does not destroy a wicked nation before its wickedness has touched the limit. That is the lesson of history. Take the Roman Empire. When did the Roman Empire perish? A modern historian gives the answer. 'When the vices of an appallingly corrupt civilisation had increased to such an extent that they threatened permanently to pollute the world, it was time that the whole foul system should be swept clean away.' And it is so all through history. An evil state, an evil system, an evil institution—each must come to its full development; then only, and not till then, it is consumed. God does not destroy the evil thing till it is perfectly ripe for destruction.

2. We shall find that God often—not always, of course, but often—effects the triumph of His cause through the temporary defeat of those who are defending it. That seems a strangely perverted way of doing things. We really cannot understand why God should work by such a method. It seems so irrational. It seems so cruel. It is about the last method that any of us would have chosen. We fancy in our folly that we could vastly improve on this arrangement. Yet it is one of God's methods for all that, and as such we must take account of it. And in case after case we unquestionably observe that the cause of righteousness wins its triumphs through and by means of the temporary overthrow of its supporters. Is not that, indeed, one of the many lessons of the Cross? Was it not the defeat of the Cross, the disaster of the Cross, that ensured the victory of Christianity? Suppose that there had been no Cross: suppose that Christ, instead of being crucified, had lived prosperously to an advanced age, and had died peacefully in His bed at last, and had been buried with pomp

and ceremony, as One esteemed and honoured and regretted by all. Would Christianity have conquered? Is it conceivable that such an uncrucified, successful Christ would have captured the heart and won the allegiance of the world? Was it not His very failure—that apparently final and desolating calamity of the Cross—that was the great and determining factor in the success of the cause Christ had at heart? 'I, if I be lifted up,' He said, 'will draw all men unto me.' Or think of the grievous crosses of the martyrs and reformers, of the upholders of noble ideals, of the inspirers and benefactors of mankind. Most of them were crucified men. The world smote them and struck them down; but out of that very defeat sprang the spiritual and inspirational power that took the whole world captive. They suffered, and suffered, and suffered; then, and thereby, they conquered.

¶ Remember those noble words written to a correspondent by Abraham Lincoln in 1864. 'The purposes of the Almighty are perfect and must prevail, though we erring mortals may fail to perceive them accurately in advance. We hoped for a happy termination of this terrible war long before this; but God knows best, and has ruled otherwise. We shall yet acknowledge His wisdom, and our own error therein. Meanwhile we must work earnestly in the best lights He gives us, trusting that such working still conduces to the great ends He ordains. Surely He intends some great good to follow this mighty convulsion, which no mortal could make, and no mortal could stay.' [1]

Our Desires.

Ps. xxxviii. 9.—'Lord, all my desire is before thee.'

What is the advantage of laying one's desires before God?

1. It clears and purifies the desires. The effort to utter them before God in prayer is a purification. Many a fixed desire which lies confusedly in the mind, filling it with distress, gets purified by the effort. The bringing it into God's presence is like bringing a mass of rank vegetation into the sunlight. Leave it there awhile. When you come back, the foul, ugly, slimy things have vanished; green things, having root in the earth and kindred with the sun, alone remain, and they grow greener, stronger, statelier; leave them still, when you come again they will be swelling with buds, and soon they will be brave with flowers and fruit. And so the pure fire of God's presence kills all that is noxious in the desire, all that is born of worldliness and lust. You may have been building your castles in the air, dreaming of this good and that good, but you dare not take it to God and say, Give it me; I want this; I must have it, or I die. Such a prayer would be voiceless on your lips, if it did not choke in your throat. No! the coming to God in prayer is like a magnet passed through a mass of dust. It all stirs; the metal separates and clusters around the magnet; the dust lies helpless, till the wind drives it away.

¶ 'Scribe' in the *Methodist Recorder* writes: 'I came across the following the other day in Miss May Sinclair's novel, *Mary Olivier*. Mary is about to go to the South of France with some friends for a long-looked-for holiday. She has more than a suspicion that the friendship is unwise, and that to go would be playing with fire. Just as she is about to set off a cablegram comes saying her brother Roddy is returning from Canada ill. "She went up to her room. Her knees felt tired . . . she was kneeling now beside her bed. She could see her arms stretched out before her on the counterpane, and her hands, the fingertips together. She pressed her weak, dragging waist tighter against the bed. 'If Anything is there, if Anything is there,' she cried, 'make me give up going. Make me think about Roddy, not about myself. About Roddy! Roddy! Make me want not to go to Agaye.' She did not really believe that anything would happen. . . . Her mind left off crying. She stood up—she had a sense of exquisite security, clarity and joy. She was not going to Agaye. She did not want to go." '

[1] F. H. Dudden.

Suppose, however, that the prayer is about an altogether righteous and sacred matter, as David's was when he poured forth this supplication in the ear of God (Ps. li.). Then the conception and utterance of the petition places the man at once in the right attitude before God; it brings out all the truth, and sets it plainly and wholesomely before the eye of the soul. The saying, 'I have sinned,' is the breaking down of the prodigal's pride, the crushing of the hard crust. The man who has set in order his petitions for pardon, cleansing, healing, has so far set himself right, in the right place and attitude, and the end of the prayer is so far won.

2. Is this all? Is this what is effectual in prayer, the setting the heart right, the cleansing, purifying influence, the receptive condition which it induces in the soul? God forbid. The soil is tilled, the weeds are dead, the seed is sown, Man has done all. But if it rested there, where were the harvest? 'The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.' It availeth much with man, it availeth much with God. It has done its work in man, and then it is with God, that He may meet it as He meets the husbandman's toil, with that quickening breath which is the parent of fruit. Prayer is the soul's husbandry. Then the early and the latter rain, the genial spring, the kindling sun warmth, the glowing summer, are the husbandry of God. My desire is before Thee, but dead as the seed in winter. Quicken it, kindle it, ripen it, make it fruitful unto life, O Thou that hearest and answerest prayer.

¶ If in the natural or material world God were to bestow His gifts of food and provision for man's bodily needs without man's having to work for them, where were the opportunity for the development even of the physical side of our being? If in the intellectual world God were to bestow His gifts of truth, and of the knowledge of the laws which are waiting in His world to be taken advantage of, without our having to exercise our brains and think, where were the opportunity for the development of the intellectual side of our being? So, if in the moral and spiritual world God were to bless ourselves and others without our praying, where were the room for the development of character—in particular, for the development of that child-like faith and dependence and surrender which, after all, is the fundamental or elemental condition of glorifying God and developing the spirit of sonship and doing true service to our fellow-men. Because this is God's chief end with His children, namely, to develop character and mould men into ever greater fitness to be the willing channels of His purposes, there are certain things which God cannot, or, at least, will not do without our asking. That is why Jesus said; 'Your Heavenly Father knoweth what things ye have need of . . . therefore ask him.' It is not that prayer changes God's mind and will, or turns Him to greater willingness to bless us or others. Rather it is that prayer provides the conditions which give God the opportunity to realize His willingness, and to bestow His gifts and blessings in such a way as that when received they shall be used for His glory and for our own and others' good. As St. Thomas Aquinas put it long ago: 'Our aim in praying is not that we may change God's appointment, but that we may procure by our prayers that which He has appointed.'[1]

The Tongue.

Ps. xxxix. 1.—'I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue.'

The Hebrews seem to have been unusually conscious of the sins of speech, and to have developed a strange sensitiveness to the dangers of an unbridled tongue. The Bible is alive with vivid images of the harm a man can do with his mouth. It likens the human tongue to that of a serpent, that restless forked organ which is mistaken by the ignorant for the sting itself, so sinister does it seem; but there is worse concealed: 'the poison of asps is under their lips.' Even the unnatural garrulity of some people, the suspicion that their

[1] J. M. Shaw, *The Christian Gospel of the Fatherhood of God*, 59.

fascinating speech arouses, does not tell you the venom they are capable of injecting into their words. Again, the tongue is likened to a whetted sword, capable of inflicting hideous wounds, and this capacity is said to be found alongside the use of smooth and oily words. Suddenly the suave manner is dropped and you are confronted by speech that is meant to slay. Or truer still to common experience: they 'have aimed their arrows, even bitter words: that they may shoot in secret places at the perfect.' Behind some anonymity the silent bow is drawn and a man's character falls by an unseen hand. There is a simile for the action of the tongue that may be passed over without notice, for it is an effect of speech that is not so familiar: 'like a sharp razor, working deceitfully.' This describes a curious experience you may have had. You visit some house and your reception is everything that can be desired: the conversation is friendly and full of interest, but when you leave and you walk home alone, you find you are smarting with pain; yet it takes the closest examination before you can see the deep clean cut, as if you had been handling a razor with an edge so fine that it would cut without your feeling it at once.

In the Epistle of St. James we have a passage that seems sheer exaggeration, so awful are the evils it traces to the tongue. Least of all our members, it is yet as powerful as the rudder of a ship: the smallest pressure and the whole course of things is changed. It is like a spark of fire that some traveller in the forest has left unextinguished, which soon has hundreds of acres aflame, until a noble forest is utterly destroyed. The writer says that while man can subdue every variety of wild beast, the tongue will defy him. And then he traces the devastating fire the tongue can kindle to the fact that it is set on fire of hell. One is apt to be so shocked at this, that one does not notice that it is surely a wonderful revelation; the fires of hell are of that same quality which the tongue can kindle. And what can it not? The vast conflagration which raged across Europe was kindled by irrepressible and untamed tongues; it was blown into flame by whispered suspicion and the breath of intrigue; it was fanned to destructive force by taunting and brutal speech. Hell is like that, according to St. James: one endless strife of tongues; blotting out the light of heaven with the smoke of suspicion, creating a suffocating atmosphere sulphurous with enmity and bitterness, keeping the flames for ever roaring with ungovernable hate.

One wonders if the Hebrew mind was especially given to this sort of malignancy; whether centuries of repression turned them to forge their tongues into swords and light their lips with flame; whether the poison of captivity settled in their speech, so that they became addicted to the sword-play of wounding words and adepts at verbal arson. There seems no reason to suppose that this is the case. It is simply a human failing which the priestly Hebrew mind extracts from us all in that great confessional the Bible; it is the characteristic stain of social intercourse which it seeks by a vicarious penitence to cleanse away from the world.

Why should the tongue lend itself so easily to evil?

1. The instrument itself cannot be blamed. The wonderful physical organ we call the tongue, one mass of nimble muscle and sensitive nerve, is of course nothing but the obedient servant of the mind. We talk of a person having a long tongue, a nippy tongue, but we are only using the name of the organ for certain proclivities of mind. Yet those areas of mind do seem to betray us beyond our intention. 'I let my tongue run away with me,' we say, as if our speech got beyond control. 'I did not mean what I said' is an excuse which will serve for a sufficient apology. Our tongue is like a tap with the washer worn away, more difficult to turn off than on, inclined to run to waste, to let out something we had meant to keep to ourselves.

This dangerous apparent defect is due to the marvellous organization of the brain. If that organ is to be any use to us it must provide a vast network of associations by which the slightest resemblances of idea, or sound, or

mere continuity in time of registration are connected, and the whole must work with a mobility beside which lightning only creeps. Let interest or excitement be strong and these associations will come rushing together and pour themselves into speech, and there will be no time to guide the movement or check the worth or propriety of the associations proffered. Let a man be primed by drink and you can get almost any secret out of him. Let the presidency of reason be withdrawn and a man of most upright life will utter most awful blasphemies and terrifying indecencies. And we sometimes get near this condition when we give too much rein to our talk. Disraeli's famous description of Mr. Gladstone as 'intoxicated with the exuberance of his own verbosity' is psychologically quite a conceivable condition.

Everything we have ever heard or thought or done or seen is registered in the wonderful filing system of the brain, and the law of association provides us with the means of finding anything that we want and recalling it to memory. There are, however, thousands of things we want only to forget, but these may be recalled by chance association in a general excitement. For while the brain registers according to our attention and our interest, other things by their very force, or even the disgust they rouse, will imprint themselves very deeply. Over all this material the mind exercises a discriminating choice, and must ever do so in the higher interests of purity and sanity. A corrupt mind will make associations between far-distant and disconnected areas, which a pure mind will discourage and allow to fall into disuse.

2. Therefore one must set a watch upon the door of one's lips. This is especially necessary to one who desires to attain any degree of holiness. There must be a resolute turning back of any word that would cause another pain. According to J. H. Newman, that is the distinctive mark of a gentleman, let alone a Christian, and we must deny ourselves even innocent and legitimate expression, if that means causing others to stumble. The gain in sensitiveness to the purer and nobler form of speech will be well worth the immediate loss in spontaneity, brightness, and interest. One can waste in brilliant conversation strength which might have been turned to higher purposes.

There ought to be about every religious person something equivalent to the much-abused doctrine of reservation. In talking about religion, especially if it is one's calling, the tongue is tempted to express more than one has experienced, with a desire to appear initiate and advanced in the spiritual life. It is a most laudable desire to be interesting in order to attract people to religion. But this mistaken policy often ends with merely interesting people in oneself and in one's ideas. The word mystic is derived from a word 'to shut,' and one of the interpretations of mysticism is that it shuts the mouth about ineffable experiences. This interpretation needs to be remembered, for many people ambitious to be thought mystics end up with being only religious pretenders.

Above all there should be about every Christian something of the priestly idea of the seal of the confessional. You may never be called to hear a confession, though the worldling is often tempted to unburden to a friendly religious soul; but do everything to avoid the responsibility, for very few of us are capable of really keeping a secret. But when the tale of scandal reaches your ears, let it stop there; let its snowball career come to an end with you, or you may find yourself cultivating a taste for evil which will corrupt the mind, and an itch to repeat the sordid story which will soon carry you beyond the bounds of truth and kindness.[1]

¶ Much of his time and strength were given to consultation, and this he ever considered a primary department of his work. His rules for consultation were well thought out and strictly adhered to. He only received such confidences as were freely offered. He hated anything like prying into people's private affairs and pursuing a clue to the end. Curi-

[1] W. E. Orchard, *The New Catholicism*, 113ff.

osity and meddlesomeness were forbidden to a true pastor. Neither should he encourage the revelation of anything more than was necessary to enable him to give his advice. It may be safely said that he never broke a confidence. The very thought of such treason seemed to fill him with horror. He betrayed, I remember, considerable excitement when he heard that many of the letters addressed to Henry Drummond by those in straits had been preserved. Drummond, like Watson, was one to whom men laid bare their hearts and their lives, and he was ready to give himself to their help without stint. Drummond, too, was never known to break a secret of the confessional. Watson was careful to destroy at once any letter recording the sad secrets of humanity. He did not fear so much that pastors might be consciously dishonourable. What he dreaded was mere leakiness.[1]

Silence.

Ps. xxxix. 2.—'I was dumb with silence.'

The Psalmist adds to this 'I held my peace.' A little farther on he says again, 'I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it.' A wise man was the Psalmist when he wrote these words. He knew what an unruly member a tongue often is; so he determined to 'keep for his mouth a muzzle' while the prosperity of the wicked moved him to murmuring.

What are the occasions for silence?

1. One occasion is when we are under the pressure of sheer inquisitiveness. There are some people who have a chronic itch of curiosity; they are the 'busy-bodies in other men's matters.' Instead of minding their own business, they pry into the affairs of their neighbours—not for the purpose of help, or sympathy, but for the gratification of insatiate curiosity. Now such persons ought not to be encouraged by being gratified. There are many things which we have a right to keep to ourselves, and which the public has no business with. Our newspapers publish quite too often what ought to be private. Every man's 'house is his castle'; if he chooses to let the whole community in, then he is responsible for the discoveries made—whether of silver on his table or of 'skeletons in his closets.' A wise man will keep his own secrets; the discreet and self-respecting will keep to themselves all those matters with which 'the stranger' has no right to 'intermeddle.' There are sore spots in almost every household that delicacy ought to conceal; why allow unfeeling hands to increase their festering or make them bleed? A thousand domestic difficulties, a thousand scandals, would never get wind if people were wise enough to padlock their own tongues about their own affairs. Be careful whom you make your confidants; 'a talebearer revealeth secrets; but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.' As for the crime of divulging what is entrusted to you in secret confidence, it is a crime compounded of falsehood and treachery. Upon the whole subject two sound rules ought to be observed: one is, never to ask what you have no right to know: the other rule is, never to tell other people what they have no right to know. So high was the Apostle's estimate of the grace of silence that he declares that 'if any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.'

2. Another occasion for silence is when you are strongly tempted to disparage others. Wilful slander all detest, but a peculiar temptation to detraction often comes in this way. We hear somebody extolled greatly; he or she has won great success, or received high praise. Envy (that hateful spirit which often disguises itself under the name of 'Justice') says to us, 'That person is set up too high; he or she ought to be taken down.' So we set over against their virtues some deformities of character or some evil things that we know about them. Grant that we do know them—why speak of them? Why fling a nasty 'fly' into that sweet ointment? When so fine a picture

[1] W. R. Nicoll, *Ian Maclaren*, 122.

has been drawn, why thrust a daub of detraction over it? Grant it, even farther, that the person thus extolled has once slighted or injured you, and here is a chance for retaliation. In the name of generosity, 'hold your peace.' If you cannot honestly join in the praise, do not let your tongue croak an envious discord; If you cannot honestly join in the praise, do not endeavour to pull him down. Silence is sometimes as magnanimous as a speech of vindication is at other times. If we cannot sincerely say anything good about our fellow-creatures, is it not better to say nothing at all?

The story that you spread
  Was all too true;
The waspish things you said
  Were just her due.

But did you play the game?
  And was there need
To blazon forth the shame
  Of her misdeed?

We might have saved her soul,
  Had yours been higher,
Had you not claimed the rôle
  Of public crier.

Had you but reined your tongue
  About the wrong,
We might to-day have sung
  A triumph song.

But through your dastard work
  She now has passed
Into the deeper murk
  That chokes at last.

The love by which at first
  We spanned the breach
Was wrecked by your accurst
  Envenomed speech.

God pity you when you
  Hereafter find
He asks, not *Was it true?*
  But *Was it kind?* [1]

[1] Kennedy Williamson.

3. Again, what answer that can be given to many an irritating word, and even to a just provocation, is as effective as dignified silence? What eloquence there is sometimes in lips sealed tight by self-control, by patient fortitude, by the serene sense of right! What sublimity there is in silence when innocence reviled reviles not again! How Divine was the silence of our Master, when, under all the buffetings and insults of His brutal enemies, He opened not His holy lips! Those lips might have summoned legions of angels to His rescue. That tongue might have shot the lightnings of heaven into the fiendish crowd of persecutors who hungered for His blood. 'Answerest thou nothing?' exclaimed the enraged High Priest. 'But Jesus held his peace.' Then Pilate broke in, 'Answerest thou nothing? behold how many things they witness against thee.' But Jesus yet 'answered nothing.' Other men have died for what they have said. Here was One who died for what He would not say, and was calmly silent.

¶ We may all make mistakes, but never a more regrettable mistake—never one that more lowered us in the judgment of friends and people not friends—never one on which we looked back with deeper shame—than when we opened our lips in the minute wherein we ought to have kept silence. It is rather by what we say, than by what we do that we make enemies. The lesson for us all is the wisdom of keeping silence under provocation. Men and women of experience are afraid to get angry. They dread provocation more than they dread pain. And with good reason. There is no experience in ordinary life which more searchingly tries us, and tests us, than provocation. There is not an experience out of which many good people come worse.

Whatever you may think of the unjust or unkind doing of a fellow mortal, beware what you say. If you are wise, you will hold your peace. No man can quite keep his dignity and self-respect while complaining that he has been ill used; but words may be uttered which, though repented of next day in dust and ashes, can never be forgot, but will abide as a

black stain upon a good reputation. Among lesser sins I do not think there is one on which people look back with deeper humiliation than their sayings and doings when tried by provocation.[1]

How Fires are Kindled.

Ps. xxxix. 3.—'While I was musing the fire kindled' (RV).

That is how every sort of spiritual fire is kindled. Fusing comes by musing. It may be a clean fire, pure and brilliant as a flame of oxygen. Or it may be a dirty fire, like one that blackens a whole landscape and throws a pall over a hundred homes. Whether it be one or other, the kindling comes of musing. We think about things and fires are lit. It is as though the mysterious friction in the exercise and process of the mind created a spark, and inflammatory things caught fire. Thought is creative of mood. Thinking generates feeling. That is how the heats of life are born, whether they be perilous heats, pregnant with destruction, or genial heats, as friendly as is the spring sunshine to the sleeping wealth of the garden.

1. What sort of fire is this that the Psalmist has been kindling? Some stroke has fallen upon him, and his life is impoverished. We have no details of his calamity to guide our imagination. Perhaps his strength has been smitten, and whereas he has hitherto grasped his tasks with the grip of an athlete, he now handles them with the feeble touch of an invalid. Perhaps some fair family union has been shattered by the rude and sudden entry of death. At any rate, whatever it be, the harmony of his life has been broken, and everything is in confusion.

He makes up his distressed mind about one thing. He will control his spirit. He will not break loose into blasphemy. And, especially, he will not utter faithless words when the wicked are before him. He will not give them the opportunity for impious laughter. He will not fill his ways with loud murmurings and complaints. Such were the vows he made to himself concerning his speech. But while he sought to control his words he did not put the same leash upon his thoughts. While he did little speaking he did much thinking. He nursed his deprivation. He dwelt upon it. His thought played round about it until the deprivation began to assume the form of a wrong. His affliction stood up before him as an outrage. He mused and mused over it, and his thought was both spark and fuel to his moods. And at length, in spite of his vows, the fire broke out like volcanic flames from central depths. He filled the air with repining. His roads were strident with his complaints. No matter who or what was his audience, he let himself go. Let anyone read the whole of the Psalm, and then turn from its feverish heat to the cool and noble equanimity of the last chapter of Habakkuk, and he will be fully conscious what sort of fire can be set a-blazing when a man's thought is moodily concentrated upon his afflictions. Concentrated thought is like sunshine gathered and focussed through a lens—the heat sets things on fire. 'As I mused the fire burned.'

2. Every fire is kindled in this way. It is even so with the fire of disastrous ambition. You can study the process in the development of the character of Brutus in *Julius Cæsar*. You can watch the fire as it kindles. A friendly conspiracy directs his musings. Hints and suggestions are given which lead his thoughts to the imperial crown. Bits of paper are thrown into his chamber window, with single sentences written on them which are full of incitement to his spirit. There are faint or clear instigations in his intercourse with his friends, and they subtly turn his thoughts to Cæsar's place and Cæsar's crown. And as he muses the fire burns, and a devouring ambition begins to blaze across his being, which transforms all his faculties into the medium of attainment.

It is equally true of the fire of jealousy. Thinking leads to burning. Direct the thought

[1] A. K. H. Boyd.

in a certain direction, and let it dwell there, let it peer about in suspecting vigilance and you will soon have a fire.

But these are gloomy and deadly applications of the law. There are bright and positive aspects of it. For instance, it is in this way that the fire of hope is kindled. It is by a certain style of thinking that we generate the hopeful mood. If we firmly set ourselves to be as those who watch for the morning, intently gazing for signs of coming day, optimistic feelings will begin to burn in our hearts even before the rising sun has tipped the hills with gold. Let anyone read his daily paper with the one purpose of searching for signs of goodness, for the unveiling of truth, for acts of justice, for deeds of mercy, for movements of philanthropy—let him do it for a month, seeking as for hidden treasure, and he will be amazed at his findings. And while his thought is at work his feelings are stirring, his fire is burning, the cold ashes of pessimism begin to glow in cheery and radiant hope. As he muses the fire burns.[1]

¶ It is a mixed world, and even the lightest-hearted will find at times that he has to make a deliberate choice of the brighter things, and to ignore the darker, if his heart is to remain light. Many a man gets little credit for his indomitable good cheer, because it is supposed that this is but his natural inclination. But a virtue is still a virtue, even though it be congenial; and those who have diligently kept their lamp of joy alight are not the least worthy of God's faithful ones. As for Stevenson, he deliberately drew upon and encouraged all the available sources of gladness. He carried with him into manhood, not only the glee that comes from physical vitality, and the sense of the world's opulence, but also the spirit of the Lantern-bearer, who carefully kept alive his inner light. His natural optimism is unquestionable, but it should be remembered that he needed it all, and that, if his strenuous choice of it had flagged, pessimism would not have been far to seek. It is a great and potent secret, that of fostering our own peculiar enthusiasm as a sacred flame. Regard yourself, as you face the simplest duty of to-morrow, as tending within your soul's temple the fires of God, and you shall find the bright parable true.[1]

[1] J. H. Jowett, *Springs in the Desert*, 76ff.

Hope in God.

Ps. xxxix. 7.—'My hope is in thee.'

This Thirty-ninth Psalm is a poem of singular beauty. Ewald calls it 'incontestably the finest of all the elegies in the Psalter.' It is a very touching lament out of the long ago, a cry from a life that had been

> Heated hot with burning fears.
> And dipped in baths of hissing tears,
> And battered with the shocks of doom.

But is it a cry for Christian lips? Is its sorrow, its dumb and almost hopeless resignation, its pathetic appeal for a gleam of light and pity, ere its writer is swallowed up in the everlasting darkness, is all this not done away for those who believe in the gospel?

That may be. Yet he is no great-hearted man, nor has he seen far or deep into life, who has not sometimes been touched by the 'sense of tears in mortal things'; and that sense has seldom found more noble or affecting expression than in the exquisite elegy which we know as the Thirty-ninth Psalm. The Psalmist was overwhelmed with his sense of the pathos of human life. 'Surely every man is but a breath' is the burden of his refrain; and though he finds his hope and antidote in God, this does not lift him completely over his sense of life's infinite and unutterable sadness. It is brief as a span. It is crushed like the moth. It is full of sound that signifies nothing. And while this is not a mood to be cherished, neither is it a mood to be always and instantly repelled. It is good to remind ourselves that most of our noise is for nothing, and that at the end yawns the grave.

[1] J. Kelman, *The Faith of Robert Louis Stevenson*, 250.

But if sorrow is a fact, God is also a fact. My life is but a vapour, but my hope is in Thee. According to some, this suggests that the Psalmist expected God to interpose and vindicate him in this world, especially as his outlook upon the world beyond is so gloomy (verse 13). But in spite of that outlook, it would still seem that the Psalmist yearns for, and hopes in, and even dimly believes in, immortality. Life is so sad that there is nothing to be hoped for here—'what wait I for?' His hope must therefore be in God, who is not bound by the frailty and the limitations of this earthly life. We may say if we please, that he is pushed, by his sorrow, into his faith in a God of the Beyond; but at any rate he is pushed upon a certainty. And the hope with which he comforted his broken heart, and the faith which steadied him when crushed by a sense of the vanity and transience of life, may be ours. Beyond the shadows of this world is the substance of that other world. Beyond the vapour which appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away is the infinite and eternal God.[1]

No coward soul is mine,
No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere:
I see Heaven's glories shine,
And faith shines equal, arming me from fear.

O God within my breast,
Almighty, ever-present Deity!
Life—that in me has rest,
As I—undying Life—have power in Thee!

Vain are the thousand creeds
That move men's hearts, unutterably vain,
Worthless as withered weeds,
Or idle froth amid the boundless main,

To waken doubt in one
Holding so fast by Thine infinity;
So surely anchor'd on
The steadfast rock of immortality.

With wide-embracing love
Thy Spirit animates eternal years,
Pervades and broods above,
Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates, and rears.

Though earth and man were gone,
And suns and universes ceased to be,
And Thou were left alone,
Every existence would exist in Thee.

There is not room for Death,
Nor atom that his might could render void:
Thou—Thou art Being and Breath,
And what Thou art may never be destroy'd.[1]

[1] J. E. McFadyen, *Ten Studies in the Psalms*, 34ff.

[1] Emily Brontë.

The Hand of God.

Ps. xxxix. 9.—'I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it.'

This man seems to be so overcome by the grandeur and the mystery of God's dealing with him that he is forced to be silent. Ordinary sorrow tends to vent itself in speech. Some mysteries, which present a point of light here and there, we discuss; we find a kind of satisfaction in comparing views, and suggesting possible solutions: but now and then we are brought face to face with a tremendous experience, where we instinctively concede that there is nothing to be said. God has done it: that is all. The thing gives no clue to itself; we stand like a belated traveller before the closed gate of an Egyptian temple, rising low-browed and grim under the stars, and no sound answers our knock. We must sit down and wait.

1. 'Thou didst it!' In the first place, then, that is something to have got firm hold of. A great deal is gained when the sorrow, however severe, or the mystery, however dark, has been traced up to God. When we can say, not *something*, but *someone*, did it, the matter is greatly simplified. We have no longer to count chances. Whatever we may think of the justice or the reason or the quality of the

dispensation, we know its source. Our questioning has no longer to range about the realms of chance, or the possible combinations of natural forces: it is confined to God. God did it. We know at least whom to question, if we do not get an answer. If there is any solution to be given, we are on the right road and in the right attitude when our face is turned towards God.

The fact, indeed, reduces us to silence; but let us be sure that we understand the meaning of the hand that is laid for the time over our mouth. It need not mean that God is rebuking our inquiry, or forbidding us to pursue it. It *cannot* mean that God is tantalizing us. It need not mean that He intends to deny us a solution. It may mean that He is putting us in the way of a solution.

A teacher sets for a boy a hard problem in algebra. The boy goes resolutely to work. The day passes, and he cannot solve it. He takes it home with him, and works at it there. He comes back next day, and all day he is busy with his problem; and towards the close of the school-day, with his face flushed, and with perhaps an angry tremor in his voice, he comes to the teacher, and says, 'I cannot do it'; and then he begins to talk passionately, to tell what methods he has tried, to hint that the teacher may have made a mistake in his statement, to complain that this or that in his algebra is not clearly defined. The teacher sees the difficulty; and, as the first step toward clearing it up, he quietly says, 'Be still! Do not talk any more! I set the problem, and I know it is right.' And if he says no more for the time, and the boy goes back to his seat, he has gained something in that interview. There is power in the thought which the lad turns over in his mind: 'This problem was set by somebody that knows. My teacher, whom I have always found wise and truthful, did it.' The thought that there may have been a mistake in the statement of the sum goes out of his mind, and the matter is thus far relieved; and, under the impulse of that relief, he may attack the question again, and successfully; or, if not, he will gain by silence, by restraint. Let the teacher speak, and let him simply listen. The teacher wisely silences him, not to check his inquiry, but to bring his mind into the right condition to receive explanation.

Just so, we are often, in the presence of our sorrows or of our hard questions, like this Psalmist—our heart hot within us, our mind a ferment of wild questionings. The best thing for God to do with us then is to silence us, and to set us pondering the naked truth—God did it! pondering it without argument, without debate, without remonstrance. If He were to give explanations in our heated and confused state, we could not appreciate them. We may think, perhaps, that His reducing us to silence is an arbitrary refusal to enlighten us; but we may possibly discover, after we have been silent a while, that a better and ampler explanation lies in the words, 'Thou didst it.'

2. But this 'Thou didst it' has some treasures of knowledge for us. Faith is not ignorance. There is a story, by a once popular Irish poet, of a Greek youth who travelled to Egypt in search of the secret of immortality. One night, by the bank of the Nile, he found a little pyramid, seemingly as solid as the rock itself; but, as he examined it more closely, he found hints of a concealed opening, and finally struck a spring, and a door opened, which led him into a region of wonders. And even so, as we go round and round this 'Thou didst it,' which seems so bare and so hard and so unpromising, which suggests at first only relentless will and resistless power, it begins to open: it conceals something, and we begin to make discoveries.

(1) God did it. Well, then, I know that *infinite wisdom* did it. These hard problems of Providence, these mysteries of society and of man—I am not to conclude that they are insoluble. There is a wisdom which understands the maze, and holds the clue to it. This tangle of society has a thread which passes up into God's hand. If He chooses not to unravel it now, there is a wise reason for it. Perhaps this mystery has a power of training for me. 'If,' says a recent writer, 'proof were possible; if God could inspire, or man

indite, an argument which should once for all interpret our life to us, solve all its problems, dispel all its mystery—it is still open to doubt whether it would be well that we should have it; for the mystery which encompasses us on every side is an educational force of the highest value. With certainty, we might be content, and we might rust in our content; but with mystery within us, and on every side of us, compelling us to ask, What does this mean, and that; and, above all, what does God mean by it all? we lose the rest of content, to gain a strife of thought which impels us onward and upward, and for which, in the end, we shall all be wiser and happier.'

(2) God did it. Then, I know that *infinite power* did it. 'Ah!' you say, 'we know that but too well. The stroke is on our hearts and homes. It is written on fresh graves, and in the scar of dreary partings.' All true. But has power no other aspect than this terrible one? Shall we symbolize it only by a hand hurling thunderbolts? May we not picture a hand, strong indeed, but open, and pouring forth blessings? 'All power is given unto me,' says Jesus. Yet He laid his hand on blind eyes, and they saw; on the paralytic, and he leaped and ran. The prophet saw these two meanings in infinite power: 'Let us return unto the Lord; for he hath torn, and he will heal us: he hath smitten and he will bind us and revive us.' Infinite power to destroy must imply infinite power to heal. And the power which turneth man to destruction, and sayeth, 'Return to dust, ye children of men,' is our dwelling-place in all generations, yea, to everlasting—the power which can stir the dead dust, and say to it, 'Return to life!' which can make us glad, according to the days wherein He has afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil.

(3) God did it, and therefore I know that *infinite love* did it. That is a piece of knowledge worth having indeed. Surely, when we reach that, we find the rock yielding water. We have to creep back for rest into the shadow of love, after all. There is a solution of mystery and sorrow which is not by logic. Just what it is, just how it is, we can no more tell than we could tell how a child is comforted, even before it has told its sorrow, by the mere pressure of its mother's arms. Moses knew when he said, 'The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.' Logic! How grimly these mighty mysteries smile at logic! Men start with the facts and conditions of their earthly existence, with the things which they see and know, and they draw their straight, logical lines, and think they keep on, in undeviating course, straight up to the region of the Divine counsels; and they seem to forget that, just as a starbeam is turned from its direct line when it passes into another atmosphere, so the line of their human logic may be strangely refracted when it passes out of the denser atmosphere of man's thought into the high, clear region of the Divine thought. No: the way to God is not the logician's way. No man ever reasoned himself to God; no man ever reasoned himself into submission under God's strokes, or into restfulness amid His mysteries. The child's way is the only way—going direct to Him who did it and resting in silence, if need be, on His Divine heart.[1]

¶ 'I was dumb because *Thou* didst it'—because the calamity was sent by Infinite Love. And so Christian resignation is not despair but ***hope!*** I have been all wrong in my view of it! I thought it was prostration; I see it is energy. I thought it was the heart sleeping; I see it is the heart on the wing. I see that the glory of the Psalmist's resignation is not his speechlessness; it is the *reason* for his speechlessness. 'I opened not my mouth because *Thou* didst it. It is a very easy thing to be dumb in the experience of suffering; I think it is the easiest of all things. The most common effect of grief is a paralysing one. But Christian resignation is the *absence* of paralysis. It comes not from loss of power, but from the *influx* of power. It is not the submission to a cross; it is the submission to a crown. It is not the wearing of a thorn; it is the wearing of a flower. It is not the crushing of a will; it is the birth of a fresh willingness. Not because I am a

[1] M. R. Vincent, *God and Bread*, 208ff.

poor creature does Christ bid me be resigned; it is because I am a rich creature, with the hope of treasures untold. 'Because *Thou* didst it'—because the shadow is a bit of the sun, because the seeming discord is the weaving of a melody, because the calamity is the disguise of *love!* [1]

The Horrible Pit.

Ps. xl. 2.—'He brought me up also out of an horrible pit.'

The word translated 'horrible' in this verse is used elsewhere for a 'din,' or what we call a roar—of the waves or a great host of men (Isa. xvii. 12b, 13 [RV 'rushing'], xiii. 4 [RV 'tumult'], Ps. lxv. 7 [RV 'roaring'], or the uproar [RV 'tumult'] of a gay city (Isa. v. 14); or the din or crash of battle (Am. ii. 2: Hos. x. 14 [AV, RV 'tumult']; Jer. xxv. 31). Hence the only sense consistent with usage that the word can have here is 'roaring.' The expression is obviously figurative; and the Psalmist may have thought of a huge pit or subterranean dungeon (the word *bôr* denotes both) at the bottom of which were roaring waters.

Thus Dr. Alexander Whyte is near the figure when he refers to Vesuvius and his experience there: 'The most horrible pit I ever saw in this world was the volcano of Vesuvius. I shall never forget the fearful sight. I see it now as I take my stand in this Gospel pulpit. My much experienced and most anxious guide said to me that, so far as he saw, he thought I might venture that day to go so near as to look over and see down into the mouth of the volcano. And holding fast by his strong hand, I crept near and looked down into that belly of hell. And the awful roaring that came up out of it; the smoke of its torment that came up out of it; the infernal fires belching red hot stones and molten lava up out of it—O God, what a never-to-be-forgotten lesson I got from Thee that day!' [2]

[1] G. Matheson, *Times of Retirement*, 248.
[2] A. Whyte, in *The British Weekly*, Apr. 20, 1915, p. 100.

1. But what does the figure signify?

(1) Dr. J. H. Jowett suggests depression of spirit: 'The man was sunk in deep and dark depression. He was what we describe as "down"—brought very low, plunged into great despondency and despair. We very well know what brings men into the pit. Grief can do it. There are few who have not experienced the grief that saps the mind, that removes one prop after another, until the life sinks deep into helplessness and night. And failure can drive men into the pit. A man makes repeated attempts to do a thing, and is as many times defeated. After a time the buoyancy of his spirit is destroyed, his nervous force is spent and the body and soul sink into limpness and profound depression: he is in the pit. A multiplicity of tasks can do it. When a man's work bears down upon him like a rude and thoughtless crowd and overwhelms him, when the head swims in the sense of innumerable tasks, he experiences what the Psalmist would have called the horrible pit, and he falls back in the gloom and faintness of despair.'

(2) But Dr. Whyte goes straight to man's sinful heart. 'We have the terror of the Lord,' he says, 'from His own trembling lips in these so awful words of His: "For from within, out of the heart of man proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness"; or as another reports Him: "Malice, slander, backbiting, treachery, and all else of that same hell-born kind." Yes; so sure was our Lord of the horrible pit that is in all men's hearts that He steadfastly set His face to go up to Jerusalem, there to purchase a clean heart for all those who feel the horribleness of the heart that they have inherited.'

2. An old divine in Wales once told his friend that he was about to publish a sixpenny pamphlet on a very important subject. 'Indeed,' replied his friend, 'what may the subject be?' 'How sin entered into the world,' answered the divine. 'Well,' said his com-

panion, 'if I were you, I would make it a shilling pamphlet and in the second part tell us how to get sin out of the world.'

Now out of this pit the Lord alone can deliver a man. Says the Psalmist, 'He inclined unto me, and heard my cry.' 'He brought me up.' 'He set my feet upon a rock.' Let us take the steps in order.

(1) 'He inclined unto me.' The figure is exquisitely helpful. 'He stretched right out and down to me.' His arm was long enough to reach me, even when I was in the deepest pit. 'His arm is not shortened that he cannot save.' God's reach is further than our perdition; His arm is longer than our alienation. 'If I make my bed in hell, he is there.'

(2) 'And heard my cry.' Just as the mother, when the house is filled with company, hears the cry of her babe in the chamber above. Or just as the shepherd hears the faint lone cry of the lost lamb in some ravine on the open moor. 'He inclined unto me, and heard my cry.'

(3) Now turn to the deliverance. 'He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay.' That is to say, He lifts me out of my captivity. We cannot struggle out. Struggling will only aggravate our bondage. When we are in the Slough of Despond One comes to us called 'Help.' 'He set my feet upon a rock.' Then He not only lifts me out of the pit, He confirms my feet. He sets me upon a bit of good road. Hitherto I have been in the miry clay, the victim of uncertainties, despondencies and doubts; the slave of sin. But now He has 'enlarged my steps under me,' and I find myself upon the highway of the Lord. And He 'established my goings.' Thus He not only lifts and confirms me, but He vitalizes my soul. When my life is in tune with His purpose, and I feel myself upon the rock, with what vigour I can step out upon the acceptable road! We all know the ease that comes to the feet when we have been trudging through heavy mire and we find ourselves upon a well-made turnpike road. As soon as we come to the good road we say to one another, 'Now we shall be able to step out.' That is the suggestion in the Psalmist's phrase, 'and established my goings.' We are able to step out, nay, to go as those who are 'marching to Zion.'

¶ I will give you what Robert Bruce says about that. Preaching on this same text in the High Kirk of Edinburgh in a time of public fast in the year 1589, 'that stately Presbyterian divine,' as David Masson calls him, has this: 'David's long and sore crying hath ane prosperous issue. For in answer to his long and sore crying, he is at last drawn up out of his horrible pit. Now from that learn this: That there is no pit so deep, either within you, or around you, that it can stop the ear of God when He inclines to listen. Be thy pit then ever so horrible, and ever so deep, only you cry like David, and you will sooner or later share David's deliverance. As long as you have the knowledge and the feeling of the horrible pit that is in your heart you are in no real danger. It is only when you have no knowledge and no feeling of your horrible heart that you are a lost man.' So far Robert Bruce, minister of Edinburgh in 1589.[1]

3. And what does the sinner himself do? Three things: he waits patiently for the Lord; he sings his song; and he tells others about his deliverance.

(1) 'I waited patiently for the Lord' (verse 1). Literally, we may translate his words, 'I waited waitingly.' There is a waiting which is thoughtless, its eyes are closed. It has no alert and expectant vision. There is a waiting which is will-less. It lies in indolent passivity, and is devoid of the spirit of endeavour. There is a waiting which is careless. It has no prayer, no voice, no cry. The Psalmist of the text brought all his powers to the task of waiting. His being was collected, and all fixed in intense expectancy on God.

(2) 'He hath put a new song in my mouth' (verse 3). There is something very beautiful in this word 'song.' It means a wandering song, strolling minstrelsy, a travelling strain of music. The song goes with the man. In all his circumstances the song continues. The

[1] A. Whyte.

singing goes on while the circumstances change. In good weather and foul the singing continues. 'And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God.' That is the very genius of Christian life. The emancipated are a singing company, and the song is never ending.

Come, Thou Fount of every blessing,
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace;
Streams of mercy never ceasing
Call for songs of loudest praise.

(3) And now the emancipated suppliant becomes an unconscious missionary. 'Many shall see it.' The delivered Psalmist does not know that he is being looked at and listened to. It was with him as with the singing Pippa, as she went her little round, and one after another was awakened by her song. It is something to make people listen to the music of an emancipated life. 'And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.' Paul and Silas were missionaries but did not know it. The prisoners were fascinated by the song, and began to make enquiries as to its origin. We are doing great service for the Master when we make the world ask questions like these. The song, where was it born? The buoyancy, what is its secret? The radiancy, whence the hidden fire? 'We never saw it in this fashion.'

And the witness is successful. 'Many shall see it, and fear.' Curiosity is deepening into reverence. Mere interest becomes religious fear. Men and women are falling on their knees in reverent adoration before the God who created the music and filled our mouth with the song. 'Shall . . . fear and trust in the Lord.' Here is reverence ripening into faith. It is a common succession, one that is repeated every day. And so the grand sequence is repeated. Those who have heard the song become singers themselves, and other companies listen unto them. And so, literally, it is altogether true that this is 'a song that hath no ending.'

¶ The Fortieth Psalm has been sung by multitudes of God's redeemed people with more or less understanding ever since David first sang it. But it has never once been sung on earth, and never will once be sung on earth, as it will be sung for ever in heaven. It will only be when we look down and see the hole of the pit out of which we will then be for ever dug that we will sing this psalm about that pit as it was made to be sung. Learn, then, these great lines well, against your first Lord's Day in His presence.

I waited for the Lord my God,
And patiently did bear;
At length to me He did incline
My voice and cry to hear.

He took me from a fearful pit,
And from the miry clay,
And on a rock He set my feet,
Establishing my way.[1]

A New Song.

Ps. xl. 3.—'He hath put a new song in my mouth.'

1. The new song is the song of *a new heart.* All good singing comes from the heart. You have often heard a singer with a really good song to sing, whose words were written by a true poet, and whose music was made by a skilful composer; and the singer had a good voice, a true ear, a thorough musical education, and a pleasing manner. But the song was a failure, because it did not come from the heart. You have seen the robin in the morning piping with might and main on the fence, his sides throbbing with excitement. You have heard the lark on a summer day far up in the bosom of a white cloud. Why does their song thrill you through and through? It is because it comes straight from the heart.

But the new song comes from a new heart. Very often when a boy or a man gets the new heart he tries to make what is literally a new song. Nearly everybody at one time or other has attempted to write poetry. It is when people are deeply moved by something that

[1] A. Whyte.

they try it. For example, they try it when someone dies whom they have dearly loved. It is very touching to go into a house and see hung up on the wall a number of verses enclosed within a black border, and surrounded by a cheap frame. It is a poem which the father made for his little daughter who died—the only poem he ever tried to make. He could not help making it; the waves of affection and sorrow were heaving within him, and insisted on finding an outlet. The lines may be very broken, and the rhymes defective; yet they are genuine: they are the nude masonry round a little well of pure feeling. They touch the heart because they have come from the heart. Now, those who get the new heart often write such new songs. It is because they cannot help it. Their soul is full, and must find vent. Sometimes they are what would be called doggerel, and not fit to print, because those who write them have not learned the art of making poetry. But they are precious to the makers of them, and remind them always of the time when they were composed.

But it is not necessary that the song should be literally new. It may be thousands of years old, like the Psalm from which the text is taken; yet if it is sung by the new heart, then it is filled with new feeling, and made a new song. You like to read such a Psalm as the Fortieth, or the Hundred-and-sixteenth, and think how for thousands of years those who have got the new heart have taken it, and poured their new, warm feelings into it, and made it as much their own and as new as if they had composed it! Could you sing that verse of the Fortieth Psalm,—

> He took me from a fearful pit,
> And from the miry clay,
> And on a rock he set my feet,
> Establishing my way—

or the Hundred-and-sixteenth Psalm,—

> I love the Lord, because my voice
> And prayers he did hear—

or M'Cheyne's hymn,—

> I once was a stranger to grace and to God—

or Toplady's,—

> Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
> Let me hide myself in Thee—

with your whole heart? I do not mean because you like the music, or think the words beautiful, or are fond of singing; but because the song is the true expression of your own feeling. Can you truly, and with all your heart, sing, 'I love the Lord'? You cannot, if you have not the new heart. But if you should get it, all those beautiful psalms and hymns you have learned and liked would become real to you, for they would be the natural expression of your own feeling; they would become ten times more dear to you; and your heart would rush into their meaning, and your voice soar into their music, like a bird darting aloft, singing as it soars, into the air and the sunshine of a bright morning. They would all become new songs to you.

2. It is the song of *the new way*. You and I are travellers to Eternity. Now, just as there are two kinds of hearts—the old heart and the new—so there are two ways in which different persons are walking through this world to Eternity. The one is the old and broad way, the other the new and narrow way. Those who have the old heart are going the old way, and those who have the new heart the new way. The old way leads down to eternal death; the new way leads up to God. The new way was made by Christ. Men did not know which way to go. Most of them willingly went the broad way to death. Yet there were a few who wished to get to God. But there was no way. Once there had been one, but it had been destroyed and lost. Jesus came down from heaven to make a way. It cost Him infinite labour—it cost Him His life. But He made it. It is long, uphill, and narrow; but it is a royal road, and leads straight to God. Those who travel along this road sing as they go. Well they may; for every step

is taking them further away from sin and nearer to God, and they are treading in the footsteps of Jesus.

The world is weary of new tracks of thought
That lead to naught—
Sick of quack remedies prescribed in vain
For mortal pain;
Yet still above them all One Figure stands
With outstretched Hands.

Men's ears are deafened with conflicting cries—
'Here wisdom lies!'—
'Here rest and peace are found!'—'Lo here, lo there,

Are all things fair!'
Yet still One Voice repeats the tender Plea,
'Come unto Me!'

Fools stumble on strange paths their fathers trod
In search of God,
But found Him not; and in the desert died
Unsatisfied:
Yet now as then One ceases not to say,
'I am the Way.'[1]

3. It is the song of *the new home*. The new way leads to the new home. The heart of man is never at rest till it rests in a home. And the new heart cannot rest except in the new home. Christ is there, and it rests not till it reposes on His bosom.

Home is the place for songs. Your homes are made glad many a night with them. It is splendid, when the night is raining outside—when the tempest is howling and the trees are swaying and creaking, when the shutters are closed fast and the curtains drawn, when the fire is blazing on the hearth, defying the cold and the storm, and sending from its great red heart a glow that reddens the faces gathered round it, and flushes the walls and the ceiling, where the big shadows are nodding—to hear the music and the songs of home. The notes of the harmonium or the piano steal out from a corner of the room, and the mother's voice rises with them in some lay of the olden time, or the elder sister pours forth a ballad of courage or love; and then the children, with hands resting on each others' shoulders and heads bent closely together, lift up their clear voices in some simple song of patriotism or hymn of praise; till at last, when the night is wearing late, the father leads all the voices in the Psalm of family worship. There is no music in the world like that. Home is the place of songs. And the new home is full of music and singing. It is because it is full of loving and joyful hearts. But the new song will be sung there only by those who have sung it here—by those whose hearts have been made new on earth, and who have travelled to heaven by the new way.[1]

[1] Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler, *Love's Argument and Other Poems*, 82.

Christ's Delight.

Ps. xl. 8.—'I delight to do thy will, O my God.'

If, with the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, we may interpret this of Christ, what shall we say of these words? From the first the Redeemer saw the will of God to be holy, acceptable, good. He embraced it and fashioned His life according to an unselfish rule. He did not seek His own glory; He pleased not Himself. He gathered up the energies of His spirit, uniting them in one life-long act of adherence to the revealed will of the Father. His understanding confessed the blessedness of such a course, His moral nature approved it, His affections were stirred to a holy gladness: 'Then said I, Lo, I am come; in the roll of the book it is written of me: I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart.'

In the simplicity which is in Christ—this union of faculties, this consent of vital powers—we may distinguish at least three controlling impulses.

[1] J. Stalker, *The New Song*, 10ff.

1. In the first place, our Lord was moved by love to do the Father's will. The love which subsists eternally between the Father and the Son is necessarily measureless. When the Word became incarnate the response of Jesus of Nazareth to the ineffable love of God was perfect in its manner. With the ardour of that affection no earthly love may for one moment compare. We may take on our lips the loftiest of human words, and say, with the Psalmist, 'O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee, in a dry and weary land, where no water is'; but that which was aspiration in the saints was attainment in Christ. To Him God was all. In most literal truth Jehovah was the gladness of His joy. Stripped of everything—home, honour, affection—despised and rejected of men, bearing our sins, and dying our death, He was yet able to say 'My God'; and it was enough.

¶ It is said that when an electric storm is moving across the sky, and the northern lights flame from the pole to the zenith, the compass needle responds with almost imperceptible vibrations to every undulation of the streaming aurora. So swift, so certain was the movement of the Spirit of Jesus to every monition of the Father. But no image can represent, no work can describe, the utter harmony of feeling and will which subsisted between our Saviour and His Father. We can only faintly picture to our minds the perfect blessedness which flowed into the soul of Him who pleased not Himself, that so He might always do the things which are well-pleasing to God.[1]

2. Again, our Lord embraced the will of the Father because His heart was in perfect sympathy with the direct action of that will. 'I am come down from heaven,' He said, 'not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the will of him that sent me, that of all that which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.' It was the will of God that the world should be redeemed, that perishing sinners should live. It was the will of God that Jesus of Nazareth should see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied, that there should come to Him out of every nation an innumerable multitude to be His joy and crown. To this the heart of Jesus turned. By setting His face steadfastly towards the joy set before Him He nerved Himself to endure the cross and despise the shame.

¶ Klopstock, the Milton of Germany, has represented Jesus in Gethsemane, crushed to earth under the weight of our curse, bathed in the sweat of blood, and trembling in an agony of supplication. Eloah, the seraph, bearing the Divine commission to comfort the Messiah, descended and drew near to Jesus. He tuned his lyre to the music of the new song, and poured forth the rapt anthem of praise which those who have been redeemed shall always render to Him who loved them and loosed them from their sins in His blood. And so, our Lord in His agony was comforted.[2]

3. Once more, our Lord embraced the Divine will as He looked to its final end. The end of the Divine will, we have been taught to say, is the glory of God. We must not think of that glory as a mere manifestation of splendour or of power; it is the revelation of love. It was impossible for God fully to display in creation or by any providential dealing the exceeding greatness of His love. The deep fountains of His tenderness could be unsealed only at the touch of sorrow and of sin. Using the familiar correspondence which Scripture recognizes as the nearest earthly likeness of heavenly things, let us remind ourselves of parental affection. Let us suppose that the beloved son, guileless and pure only yesterday, as it were, has bemired himself in sin. He has gone to a far country; his soul is beggared, hungry, faint. And the love of the father pours itself out as from an exhaustless fountain, in sorrow, in tenderness, in saving energy, until the lost one is brought home with rejoicing; or until the heart of the old man breaks as he journeys heavily along the path to the grave, sobbing out with broken breath amid his tears, 'O my

[1] D. M. M'Intyre.

[2] *Ibid.*

son, my son, would God that I had died for thee, my son, my son!'

This is a picture narrowed and faint, but true, of the love of God towards a dying world that has been doomed by sin. And thinking of this, as He faced the Cross, Jesus cried: 'O righteous Father, the world knew thee not, but I knew thee; and these knew that thou didst send me; and I made known unto them thy name, and will make it known; that the love wherewith thou lovedst me may be in them, and I in them.' By His advent, by His patience, by His tears, by His passion, by His blood, our Saviour, embracing His Father's will, declared the Father's name. And therein His joy was fulfilled.

CHRISTIAN OBEDIENCE.

Ps. xl. 8.—'I delight to do thy will, O my God.'
Jn. xiv. 23.—'If a man love me he will keep my word: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him.'

I.

THE CHRISTIAN OBEYS.

Christianity has a religion for all sorts and conditions of men, for all ages and temperaments. Work and prayer, contemplation, obedience, aspiration, communion, all mix and mingle in the complex experience of the Christian community. But the one thing common to all, the one thing with which all may begin and which none may ever outgrow, is obedient loyalty to the spirit and commands of our Lord. Out of belief springs practice, and from our confession of faith proceeds the conduct of our life. We can readily see the supreme importance and absolute necessity of obedience. Even our own conscience tells us this, quite apart from the clear teaching of the Word of God. We should show our faith by our works (Ja. ii. 18), 'for faith without works is dead;' and on the other hand, by works faith is perfected and proved. This is the right and proper place of obedience. Let us consider it in a little more detail.

1. This ideal of a joyful voluntary obedience based on a clear knowledge of the will of God is characteristic of Christianity. It corresponds to a new conception of the Divine character, first adumbrated by the great Jewish forerunners of Christianity, and fully expressed for the first time in the teaching of Christ. It speaks of a God who, whilst still zealous for the righteousness which has been the staple of past revelations, wishes to be known by a love which accepts only the service of congenial minds. He is no longer satisfied by outward conformity to a code enforced by remorseless power. The question whether a ruler enlists into his service freemen or slaves is a test of what he himself is in his essential spirit and life. The pitiless iron despot is content if he can gain by any instrumentality the things upon which he has set his desire.

Now any trace of the servile temper in either the life or death of our Lord and Master would have implied a despotic God, or, at least, a God who glories in the terrible strength which exacts, rather than in the lovingkindness which wins, the response of a free devotion. But the offering which ransoms the race had to be an act of filial love rendered to a Divine Father.

God made thee perfect, not immutable;
And good he made thee; but to persevere
He left it in thy power—ordained thy will
By nature free, not over-ruled by fate
Inextricable, or strict necessity.
Our voluntary service he requires,
Not our necessitated. Such with him
Finds no acceptance, nor can find; for how

Can hearts not free be tried whether they serve
Willing or no, who will but what they must
By destiny, and can no other choose?
Myself, and all the Angelic Host, that stand
In sight of God enthroned, our happy state
Hold, as you yours, while our obedience holds.
On other surety none: freely we serve,
Because we freely love, as in our will
To love or not; in this we stand or fall.[1]

2. This obedience must be voluntary and should be joyful. It may be difficult, but it must never be grudging and 'canny.' It is certainly true that we ought to do what the law enjoins; and hence the mistake of supposing that this is sufficient, though we do nothing more. It is true that we ought not to do what the law forbids; the error is in reckoning everything as right that is not forbidden, and everything that is forbidden as wrong in exact proportion to the punishment denounced against it. Grudging obedience counts nothing: difficult obedience may count very much indeed: but the kind that counts most is ready obedience, the obedience of love. A condition of mere subjection to the moral law might produce respect, reverence, obedience but not love; to fulfil the condition of love we must rise above the impersonal law to the Personal Lawgiver.

Yet we are not to despise difficult obedience. It may be too difficult for joyfulness, but that does not make it less valid. Quickness is not everything. The reluctant service which shows a resolute will not to be turned aside from a right purpose by any degree of its own reluctance is perhaps in many cases the better service. The man who, in spite of great inward difficulty, yet compels himself to do right may very possibly be rendering a surer and nobler service than the man of a more facile nature, who lightly does each duty as it comes, and seems to have very little effort in doing so. But though the reluctant service may, for all that men can see, be the more real service, it is not the more beautiful. It is not the service that makes other men's service easier.

¶ When God has all that He should have of thy Heart, when renouncing the Will, Judgment, Tempers, and Inclinations of thy old Man, thou art wholly given up to the obedience of the Light and Spirit of God within thee, to will only His Will, to love only in His Love, to be wise only in His Wisdom; then it is that everything thou doest is as a Song of Praise, and the common Business of thy Life is a conforming to God's Will on Earth, as Angels do in Heaven.[1]

3. This obedience is the test of the value of our knowledge of God. Let everyone hear and mark this fact. There can be no true child of the Kingdom, whether in the Church or out of it, who is not a worker of righteousness. Conversely, all workers of iniquity, whether in the Church or out of it, are children of the devil. Again, if we profess love or friendship for Christ, but keep not His commandments, our profession is vain and our true place is with the workers of unrighteousness.

(1) Knowledge without obedience ends in nothing. It is, as St. James says, like a man who looks at his own face in a glass. For the time he has a clear perception of his own countenance, but when he has gone his way, the whole image fades, so that he becomes habitually more familiar with the aspect of all other things than with his own face. Nothing can better express the shallowness and fleetingness of knowledge without obedience. For the time it is vivid and exact; but it passes off in nothing—no resolution recorded in the conscience, or, if recorded, none maintained; no change of life, nothing done or left undone for the sake of the truth which is shadowed out in the understanding. This is the folly which our Lord rebukes in the parable of the man who built his house upon the sand. He was not comparing the solidity of doctrinal foundations, but exhibiting the folly and disappointment of knowledge without obedience. 'Every one that heareth these say-

[1] Milton.

[1] William Law.

ings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell, and great was the fall of it.'

(2) Knowledge without obedience is an arch-deceiver of mankind. 'Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves'—*deceiving,* i.e., as if you were any the nearer heaven for a cold, barren consciousness that the gospel is the word of God, or a clear intellectual perception of its several doctrines. We see men who know everything a Christian has need to know for his soul's health, and who yet are as little like Christians in their daily habit of life as if they had never reached beyond the moral philosophy of heathen schools. But nothing would make them believe it; they have deceived their own selves. Again, there are men who can never speak of religious truth without emotion, and sometimes not without tears; and yet, though their knowledge has so much of fervour as to make them weep, it has not power enough to make them deny a lust.

¶ God accepts obedience without emotion, but cannot accept emotion without obedience. To advise generosity and be selfish, to praise heroism and be a coward, to say, 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things the Lord says—this is self-deception and self-destruction. Obedience God will have, and there is no substitute for it. So essential is it to life, so important is it in all physical, intellectual, and spiritual development, that God is willing to wait for grace and beauty, the high colour of feeling, the glow of enthusiasm, if He gets plain obedience. He is not afraid for the flower, if He can get the root. Even knowledge, the appreciation of what the commandments are, He is not jealous over, if only we will do our best to keep His commandments as far as we do understand them. He knows that light comes through doing, not through dreaming; that the best way to understand His will is not to try to understand it, but to try to do it. So it is a thousand times better to do God's will without knowing it than to know it without doing it. It is right to say, 'I wish I knew God's will more perfectly.' It is better to pray, 'O God, help me to do thy will, as I know it, more perfectly than ever.'[1]

4. This obedience may be tested. How are we to know if our obedience is sufficient? It must be submitted to test, so that we may know whether we are fulfilling this great condition on which God's plentiful mercy may be obtained. This test is twofold.

(1) The primary test is, Do we love our neighbour? The Apostle of love has himself told us plainly: 'If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother he is a liar, for if he love not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?' This is given us as a crucial test. The man who loves his neighbour as himself will have no difficulty in loving God and so obeying Him.

¶ In a Korean village there was a Christian convert who learned the whole of the Sermon on the Mount by heart, and then he set out and tramped a hundred miles that he might recite it to his pastor. When he had finished the recital, he was told that he must now put the Sermon into practice. His reply was, 'But that is the way in which I managed to learn it. At first I tried to commit it to memory by rote, and it would not stick. So I hit upon this plan: I would learn a verse, and then go out and find a heathen neighbour and practise that verse on him. Then I found that it would stick!'[2]

(2) The secondary, though very important, test is, Are we ready to obey when it means sacrifice? We cannot call a child obedient if his obedience has never cost him anything; nor do we know that he will obey when the trial comes unless he has been already put to the test, and so has had an opportunity of applying the principle which existed in his heart. In this progress from the principle to the application, from the disposition to the deed, there is, and must be, suffering. St. James says: 'Count it all joy, my brethren, when

[1] M. D. Babcock, *Thoughts for Every-Day Living,* 102.
[2] T. H. Darlow, *At Home in the Bible,* 51.

ye fall into manifold trials; knowing that the proof of your faith worketh patience. And let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking in nothing' (Ja. i. 2-4).

¶ There is no glory in any service for Christ if it stops short of sacrifice. It is said that when Dr. Temple was Bishop of London he sent a young man to a position involving much hardship. The young man's friends tried to dissuade him from accepting it, and he went to the bishop and told him that he believed he would not live two years if he accepted the appointment. Dr. Temple listened and replied somewhat in this way: 'But you and I do not mind a little thing like that—do we?'[1]

II.

WHY THE CHRISTIAN OBEYS.

1. *The Christian obeys because he has the vision and the trust born of vision.* What is the life-relation to God out of which true obedience proceeds? This is not difficult to determine. It contains two elements. There must be a vision of the Divine ideal, and there must be a living trust in that ideal. There must be a vision, of course, or else there is no ideal for the life. There must be spiritual insight to the extent of the law that is revealed. And there must be a living trust in that ideal, otherwise the life would be paralysed. There would be no energy for achievement, no putting forth of prayer. That is what the New Testament calls faith, and it is there defined as consisting of the very two elements that we have arrived at. 'Faith is the foundation of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.' Or, to put it into a more modern form: 'Faith is the foundation of hope, and the vision of the unseen.' Now these two things bring us up against a paradox. A paradox is something that sounds as if it could not possibly be true, but is so, and Christianity is full of such. 'Three in One and One in Three' is a paradox: so is 'he that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life the same shall find it.' Let us see what is the paradox here. To obey we need the love of God. We cannot have the love without the vision: and the easiest way to find the vision of God is to obey God. It looks like reasoning in a circle—but the circle can be the symbol of eternity and perfection.

How are we to find the vision? Sometimes God seems to show it to us before we ask it: at other times it comes as the reward of long seeking. Since the Spirit is a renewing presence, coming in its own way, with its own high purposes to fulfil, our part at its best is undoubtedly to maintain an attitude of ever-ready receptivity, that 'lowly listening' which invites 'the right word.'

¶ If we hear our conscience and set our face to duty, it will be with us as with the traveller who ascends the Gemmi Pass. When he comes to the foot of the precipice along whose ledges and through whose crevices the narrow path ascends, the mist may be lying heavy, and at first he may not find the starting point. Once his feet are upon the path, although he cannot see beyond a few yards and has no idea how the path may wind, it is only a matter of dogged and careful perseverance. With every step the mist grows more luminous, glimpses of the crest can now and again be caught, and suddenly the traveller comes out from the cloud into the clear sunlight on the height, with the spotless snow around him and the blue of God's heaven over his head. He that wills to do God's will shall come to know God's will before set of sun.[1]

But we can never have the full vision of the light unless we are obedient to what light we already have. Obedience alone can enable us to enter into the mind and will of God. Men say that when they know they will do; Jesus says that when they do they will know. He does not promise to manifest Himself to the man who dreams or debates, but to him who keeps His commandments. The seeds of truth sprout in the soil of obedience. The words of Jesus in the mind of a disobedient man are no more vital than wheat in the wrappings

[1] J. R. Miller, *The Glory of the Commonplace*, 89.

[1] J. Watson, *The Inspiration of Our Faith*, 139.

of a mummy. To know the divinity of Jesus' teachings, we must do His will with definite intention. Moral disobedience is mental darkness, but to submit our wills in loyalty to His law is to open our minds to the light of His truth.

¶ The wise man knows his master. Less or more wise, he perceives lower or higher masters; but always some creature larger than himself—some law holier than his own. A law to be sought—learned, loved—obeyed; but in order to its discovery, the obedience must be begun first, to the best one knows. Obey *something;* and you will have a chance some day of finding out what is best to obey. But if you begin by obeying nothing you will end by obeying Beelzebub and all his seven invited friends.[1]

2. *The Christian obeys because,* having the trust and the vision, *he has the love of God.* One of the most striking peculiarities of Christianity is its continual appeal to the affections; its introducing, as a principal motive to obedience, love towards our heavenly Master. He appeared as 'God with us,' and as partaking of our Nature, with a view both to display to us an exalted and perfect model of goodness and to awaken in us more effectually those feelings of affectionate attachment which it would be less easy to entertain towards God considered as the invisible Author and Governor of the universe. There is no obedience worth calling so which is not the child of love; and all the multitude of right things which Christians do without that motive are made short work of by the principle, 'If ye love me keep my commandments.' The 'keeping of my commandments,' which has not 'love to me' underlying it is no keeping at all. Christ taught that actively obeying is a more genuine manifestation of love than pouring out useless tears at His departure. 'Obedience is better than sacrifice' is an Old Testament proverb which is abundantly illustrated in the New Testament. Indeed, obedience is the very highest form of sacrifice, for it shows that we make a sacrifice of self and of selfish interests. Not sentimental sighing and crying is the true way to illustrate genuine love on the part of the disciples toward their Lord. Love can never be satisfied with mere sentiment; love is never inoperative. Love marches out along the line of practical service; it obeys.

¶ Do everything by love and not by effort, love to obey rather than fear to disobey.[1]

I will not work my soul to save,
For that my Lord has done;
But I will work like any slave,
For love of God's dear Son.

[1] Ruskin, *Fors Clavigera*—Letter 54.

Considering the Poor.

Ps. xli. 1.—'Blessed is he that considereth the poor.'

1. On Maundy Thursday the Pope and the prelates of the Church of Rome perform the ceremony of washing the feet of twelve beggars; and on that day in various kingdoms the sovereign used with his own hands to wash the feet of as many poor men as he was years old, after which the royal doles—consisting of meat, clothes, and money—were distributed amongst them. But a simpler and more beautiful custom is that which has all along prevailed in the Church—namely, the practice of associating the dispensation of the Lord's Supper with an offering for the relief of the poor. Justin Martyr tells us in his *Apology* that the Christians of the second century, immediately after they had celebrated the Communion, 'contributed according to their ability and inclination; and what was collected was delivered to the bishop or president of the assembly, who relieved with it widows and orphans, the sick, and those who were in want from any other cause—prisoners, travellers, and strangers, and in a word, all that had need.'

(1) To consider the poor is *Godlike.* This is what the Giver of all good is always doing. All His creatures are poor, in the sense of

[1] St. Frances de Sales, *Letter to St. Jane-Frances de Chantal.*

being absolutely dependent on Him. He gives us life and breath, food and clothing. During our entire lives we are pensioners upon His bounty. The Bible picture of God is that of One who gives Himself up for others. In His common providence He has not arranged that all things shall flow in towards Himself, as into an all-devouring vortex, while He sits idly enjoying all. Rather God is like the sun in the summer sky, whose 'going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it'—scattering everywhere light, and heat, and power. He works for all His creatures. The eyes of all wait on Him. He is the Almighty Minister of the universe.

(2) To consider the poor is *Christlike.* Our Lord's mission to the world was a mission for the relief of the poor. His ministry among men was a ministry among the poor. How suggestive and beautiful was the text from which He preached about Himself in the synagogue at Nazareth! Instead of selecting some grand, royal passage, from which to proclaim His imperial greatness, He chose an oracle of Messianic sympathy and tenderness, forecasting a ministry of pity and help. 'When he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.' These words were His text, and His entire after-ministry was the sermon. He went about doing good. He sent this message to John in prison: 'The poor have the gospel preached to them.'

Christ considered the poor by becoming poor Himself. That is a sublime motive to charity which the Apostle Paul suggests to the Corinthian Church: 'Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.' What a munificent gift! What an unparalleled act of self-sacrifice! We are prone to give to the poor what costs us little—our broken meat, our cast-off clothing, our loose change; but Christ gave *Himself.* 'The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.' In stooping to wear our nature, in consenting to bear our sin, and, above all, in losing, when on the Cross, the consciousness of His Father's favour, Jesus became poor.

(3) To consider the poor is *brother-like.* It is only the man who has gone in the way of Cain who says, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' The true follower of Christ will recognize the claim of every afflicted and down-trodden fellow-creature to sympathy and succour. The poor were Christ's clients and witnesses, and they ought to be ours also. We do not require to look far for opportunities of acting the part of the Good Samaritan; for the poor and the wretched are the world's sad and uniform majority.

¶ 'This psalm,' says Ruskin, 'is of singular importance in the blessing promised to the man who *understands* the poor. There are hundreds of places in which direct help to them is commanded, or blessed; but here is meant the rarer virtue of understanding their infirmities. For which the reward is that God will make our own bed, in our own sickness, and uphold us in our integrity before those who think evil of us, and above all that he will bless us with the blessing of the poor; blessings of the *ground*—on humility of heart.'[1]

2. The blessedness spoken of is both present and future.

(1) Kindness to the destitute brings an *immediate* reward. 'Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.' The supreme pleasure of life consists not in getting, but in giving.

It is better to dwell by the river's birth
Than a sea of waves to win,
To live by the love that floweth forth,
Than the love that cometh in.

There is also the Divine promise of requital, not only in time, but *in time of need.* 'Blessed

[1] Ruskin, *Rock Honeycomb.*

is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him, and keep him alive; and he shall be blessed upon the earth: and thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his enemies. The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness.'

(2) And there is the promise of reward *in eternity*. It is a beautiful thought that God permits us, by showing mercy and pity, to make Him our Debtor. 'He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will he pay him again.' This gracious reward shall be given in the day 'when the Son of man shall come in his glory.' And the reward shall be royal honours—heirship to a kingdom! 'Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.' 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.'

Wide-eyed, wondering whom or what he should meet,
Robinson died, and came to the judgment-seat;

Saw a welcoming face that smiled at his own;
'Master! Master!' he cried, 'Had I only known!

Only believed that the story was really true,
I should have worshipped, I should have followed you;

I should have been your servant and done your will,'
Jesus said to him, 'Nay, but you served me still.

I was the sensitive child, at your Public School,
(Have you forgotten?) you shielded from ridicule.

I was the passionate boy that you didn't tease,
I was the awkward lout you put at his ease.

I was the factory lads that you taught to play
After your office hours on a Saturday.

I was the hungry people you clothed and fed,
I was the lonely bores that you visited.

Mine were the trivial faults to which you were blind,
I was the German clerk to whom you were kind.

Whenever you fought for justice, I fought with you;
Whenever you pleaded for pity, I pleaded too.

Now there is other work on the harvest land
Waiting for you to do it. Give me your hand.' [1]

The Nucleus of Evil Character.

Ps. xli. 6.—'His heart gathereth iniquity to itself.'

THE way to gather a huge snowball is to make a little one, and then roll it along, and it gains bulk and strength as it is rolled. It makes increase in its goings. The way to leaven a bowl of meal is to begin with a bit of leaven, and it will do all the rest. The momentous thing is to have a nucleus, and the nucleus will gather things that are congenial to its own nature. Like unto like—that is the law of life. Begin with a little, and the little organizes its own increase. It gathers its kindred unto itself.

And all this is true of sin. One particular mode of sin can be a nucleus round which gathers a sinful life. It draws to itself strength and increase, and its putrid presence sends tainted influence into all life's concerns. A little corruption in a kitchen can touch all the food with defilement. One vice can pollute a soul.

[1] G. F. Bradby, *The Way*, 18.

It is very significant that in Dante's Inferno each soul is punished for one type of sin. Some are punished for avarice, some for gluttony, some for envy, some for hatred. One particular sin has ascendancy, and it meets with a corresponding judgment. But Dante does not teach that a particular sin can stand aloof in the life, like some poisonous weed in an otherwise lovely garden. Dante teaches, as much as any man, that solitary sins do not run through life like single lines of thread. Indeed, life is never a matter of separated lines, like railway lines which run side by side and never meet. Life is a most intimate and complicated web, and its interwoven meshes are more closely related than anything we can conceive. No man can be avaricious and have only a single thread of defilement running through his soul. His avarice will be creative of other vices; it will call them, and enlist them in its service, as surely as a cesspool calls the wandering flies and sends them to carry its plague over wider fields. A glutton is not a man of a single vice, like a country that has only a single hill towering above the plain. There will be other peaks of vice, and together they will constitute a mountain range of viciousness. And these other heights will be gathered round the central height of gluttony, and will lean on it like lesser hills upon the central strength.

That is surely Dante's meaning. The single sin is the organizing nucleus, and it gathers to itself a kindred character. No man ever rests contented with a single sin; the sin becomes a host, and yet the predominant sin is the destructive presence by which the soul is ultimately poisoned and destroyed. Sin 'gathereth iniquity to itself.'

Therefore it is the high wisdom of life to search out and destroy the tolerated vice. Make a lynx-eyed search for the bit of tainted meat in the larder. Have no mercy on the putrid nucleus which in itself may seem comparatively harmless. 'Make no provision for the flesh.' That is to say, do not leave anything hanging about in the life in which a carnal character can find a feast. Be intolerant of every evil which will feed and fatten other evils. Root out the seemingly single vice and you will destroy an entire brood. Root out the bitter weed and you sweeten the whole bed.[1]

The Need of God.

Ps. xlii. 1.—'As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.'

It is man's sense of need that has provided the foundation on which every religion has been built. Religion is one of the greatest and most persistent of all human needs, and it is best to begin by studying it as such. Nor will such a study be without value in helping us to discover whether there is any reality corresponding to that need. We cannot, of course, infer from the mere presence of any desire that the desire will be fulfilled. Man desires many things that will never be fulfilled, which indeed he himself comes through experience to cease to wish for. But the need for religion persists through varying changes of form, it survives great shocks of change and trial, it continues often when belief is overthrown, it intensifies rather than diminishes with the extension of knowledge. Neither the new conquest of Nature, nor the sudden accumulation of material riches, gives any support to the idea that religion is man-made and temporary. Religion is at least man's answer to something in the universe; it is not created out of nothing.

Let us, then, inquire what man's religious need is. Why does man need God?

1. *Man needs support for his moral intuitions.*—God is necessary as a guarantee of the existence of truth. All man's striving after knowledge, his patient research, his obstinate questionings, can be undertaken only on the conviction that there is such a thing as Truth, that there is a possibility of his thoughts mirroring reality, some sort of correspondence between his mind and that which is ultimate. Let that conviction be undermined, and of what use is mental effort? Science would be

[1] J. H. Jowett, *Springs in the Desert*, 88ff.

reduced to a practical device for subjugating Nature; philosophy would be madness; argument, the appeal to reason, would be a waste of time. It is essential to our thought that something akin to mind must be prior cause, both of our minds and that on which they exercise, cause both of ourselves and of the world, a third somewhat which completes and harmonizes both; that Truth must be there, the basis of all things; that Truth must be independent of our minds, there for us to seek, and not our making. And this means that Mind must be prior to all, and the cause of all. It is inconceivable that we should be able to imagine that which is greater than the ultimate reality, for our imagination always draws in the end from reality. And this reality must be unchangeable and eternal Truth. It must be Infinite Mind.

What we need in God is the reality of those things for which we spiritually long: purity, unselfishness, goodwill and love. These are inconceivable as abstractions, they are properly only attributes of personality, and if they do not exist in the Supreme Personality, they do not exist outside man at all. However rare the vision, however different from what we expect or can imagine, we must hope one day to look upon the vision of Perfect Purity, Adorable Beauty, and Eternal Love.

2. *Man needs God as the completion of himself.*—Man is obviously incomplete, his life a broken arc, his experience only a fragment of some greater whole. There is what he is, visible and known of all men; there is what he ought to be, perhaps only visible to himself in his highest moments. Who will say that what he ought to be is not as real as that which he is, and, indeed, is not the chief factor in what he is? Like the crescent moon, which reveals to the careful eye the full orb, dimly visible within the shadow, so man, deeply considered, always suggests God as his counterpart.

(1) Man's history needs God for its explanation. Evolution, we are told, is man's gradual adaptation to his environment. Is it not strange that the working of gradual adaptation has evolved in him features that seem to unfit him for that environment, if that environment is indeed careless, blind Nature? Viewed externally, experimented on, observed empirically, apart from æsthetic and religious feelings, that environment seems to sanction only strength and cunning, not love or sacrifice. And yet in adaptation to this environment man has come to desire to serve others rather than himself, to choose an ideal, often at great material loss, to fling his life away for country, love or truth, contrary to all his supposed instincts. Either there is another environment, invisible, but more appealing and powerful, or our natural account of that environment is distorted and incomplete. Undoubtedly man's environment is something to which he is gradually approximating. Therefore our explanation of that environment will be incorrect unless we include man's whole reaction to it. In the highest type of human life we see, more truly than science can tell us, what man's environment is. As we watch man's history, as we remember many whom we have known, we are bound to conclude that in God we live, and move, and have our being. Nor is it wanting in true scientific validity when we believe that in Jesus of Nazareth we have a very safe clue to the universe of God.

(2) Man needs the friendship of the Infinite. Philosophers and lesser folk stumble at the idea of the personality of God, mainly because we cannot define exactly what we mean by personality. But certain it is that man can have no friendship with the impersonal. He may submit to, or he may fight against, the impersonal: but he can never find that friendship which is religion with anything less than himself. If God cannot feel for us, answer our weak prayers, and aid us in our life, then what remains is not God, whatever else it may be. Yet everywhere man bears witness to the Infinite acting upon him, and to his longing for personal acquaintance with Him. In all the human friendships man makes he seeks a friendship higher than human. How he idealizes those whom he loves! It is the very tragedy of human relationship that, weak and failing as we are ourselves, we always judge others by some standard of perfection. Why

do we grieve so when, in the course of Nature, they die and are no more? Why is it that human love is charged with a capacity for eternity?

3. *Man needs God to restore his soul.*—Whatever view is taken of human sin, no one can deny that man does feel the need of being put right again. He needs not so much deliverance from the suffering sin may bring, but deliverance from a far worse danger—that his sin may make it impossible for him to suffer. If we turn from the light we possess, for whatever reason, rebellious or misguided, there is dreadful cause to fear that for us the light may grow less clear, that our action may deflect our judgment of truth and put us beyond the appeal of love. If, then, there is no place in this universe where we can seek a Light that shines when we turn our backs upon it, a Love that remains constant when we prove false, our condition is utterly hopeless.

Whatever else in life must be taken on risk, the possibility of moral deterioration is one that every earnest man must greatly fear and seek to be secured against. If under temptation he yields to sin's unholy enticement—and who of us has not known this bitter humiliation?—then, unless there exists some fountain where the nature may be made clean, some abiding perfection in the presence of which the faded ideals may be restored, some pitiful ministry where sensitiveness may be regained, man is without security, yes, without ground for hope. It is not merely forgiveness, in the common and superficial sense of the term, that man so desperately needs, but soul renewal.

And such a need can be answered only if there is a God, and if man is man. If man is the highest there is, and yet is fatally determined within himself, so that he can receive no accession of moral life, how could he ever dream himself a sinner, see himself to be less than he ought to be, and how feel that pain of self-reproach which is at once his tragedy and his hope? If man is the highest there is, and is absolutely free to be ideal, then his fall is unpardonable sin and irretrievable madness; his fall is that of a god, without help or hope. And on either of these assumptions we should have to re-write the spiritual history of mankind, dismiss his pains as imaginary, and his tears as idle. But if man is only man, and God is God, there is hope that if we fall, we may fall but to rise.

If this intense and crying need has arisen within man, and within a universe that contains no answer to it, it is not only useless to pray, and irrational to believe, it is vain to hope, or think, or strive. Let that negation be considered seriously, thoroughly, and rigorously, and from it there will arise a faith certain and triumphant.[1]

Thirst.

Ps. xlii. 2.—'My soul thirsteth for God.'

No one who ever heard it would forget the vivid delight with which Dr. Liddon used to recall the fervour of Russian worship. He had been present at some high festival at St. Petersburg, where the church was crammed to the doors, and the worshippers stood jammed together in a compact mass; but every now and again some one individual would be seized with a passionate desire to prostrate himself in devotion. To this end he had to clear himself a space, which he set to work to do with dangerous energy by digs of elbows, and thrusts and kicks, until he had wedged his neighbours yet tighter into one another—a process which they bore with a perfect understanding of what he was at, and a respect for his devotional necessities; and then with a rapid prostration on to that spot of floor which his vehemence had made visible, he relapsed into peace, relieved of his emotion, while the patient crowd closed round him again, until another and yet another would be seized with the same passion of prayer.

'My soul thirsteth for God.' We can say the words; we can feel what it would mean to be able to say them with a fuller desire.

[1] W. E. Orchard, *Sermons on God, Christ and Man*, 175ff.

We can crave to be among the number of those who have so thirsted; we wish that we could indeed express ourselves as strongly, as pregnantly; but if somebody else had never said the words, we should never have produced them of ourselves. We should never have ventured to name our frail emotions by any term so vehement as that. Somebody has actually thirsted for God, and we can now repeat his given phrase, and can recognize its ringing power; but if anyone challenges us to say what we actually mean by it, what is there that we could offer as a sample? What is there positively in us that we can venture to dignify by so splendid a title as 'a thirst for the living God'? Alas! that Russian Mujik whom Dr. Liddon saw in his grotesque prostration knew a secret which escapes us. He had hold of the real heart of the matter. Would that we could be as he!

Yet we do thirst. Desire, eager desire, looks out from the eyes of humanity. Some want, some noble or ignoble passion, some hope, some greed, some unfulfilled desire exists in every man and woman. Though the things thirsted for are different, the thirst itself is the same in kind; but it varies indefinitely in degree. In some it parches always, in others it concentrates itself in moments; but it never allows any of us to rest altogether. We are like wanderers through a dry land who find enough water to save them from death, but never enough to satisfy them. The very body is affected by the unquiet of inward desire. The moving hands, the walk, the attitude, tell of the craving soul. Even in those who have learnt or inherited the mastery of the body, the mouth trembles, the eyes flash, in unguarded moments and speak the cravings that are athirst within. 'My soul is athirst' is a universal cry; the cry which, however men may make us descend from the brute, separates us from the brute by an infinite, unbridgeable gulf. No brute has ever thirsted for fame, or wealth, or love as we understand it. But we do.

1. We thirst for *fame*. Ambition is a common passion—not only 'that last infirmity of noble minds,' but the first infirmity of ordinary men. The way to fame is long and weary; and the common man turns to an easier desire. But the other who persists leaves behind the quiet ways, and strikes upwards to the mountain-top. The way is steep and rugged; our very heart is worn before we win what we desired; and when it is won, we are still in want. The pool on the mountain rock, at which on that lonely height we drink, is shallow; the water is brackish, and it is soon exhausted. 'I am,' we cry, 'as thirsty as before, but I know not for what I thirst. God! hast Thou brought me here only to prove that I have been mistaken all my life? To win what I wished for, and find it as dry as a bone—the abyss of being empty still, the craving for life still as fierce as when I was young.' And God answers: 'Of thine own will art thou here, not of mine. Earth's ambitions exhaust my children and are themselves exhausted. The true ambition is to be at one with me, thy Father. That is inexhaustible; it does not exhaust, but empowers its pursuer; when thou art at one with me, the universe is thine.'

¶ I suppose the most exalted and least 'carnal' of worldly joys consists in the adequate recognition by the world of high achievement by ourselves. Yet it is notorious that—

> It is by God decreed
> Fame shall not satisfy the highest need.

It has been my lot to know not a few of the famous men of our generation, and I have always observed that this is profoundly true. Like all other 'moral' satisfactions, this soon palls by custom, and as soon as one end of distinction is reached, another is pined for. There is no finality to rest in, while disease and death are always standing in the background. Custom may even blind men to their own misery, so far as not to make them realize what is wanting; yet the want is there.

I take it then as unquestionably true that this . . . proves a vacuum in the soul of man which nothing can fill save faith in God.[1]

[1] G. J. Romanes.

2. There are some who thirst for *wealth*. As the hart panteth after the water brooks, we long for money. Night and day we pursue the quest, bestowing on it the energies of immortality, sacrificing to it the noblest things we possess—time, will, love, character, conscience, pity, sensitiveness, imagination, humanity and God. And when we get it, we want more of it. The more we have the more we desire, till the passion for accumulation becomes a disease in the mind, and eats the soul like fire. In the fierce symbolism of the mediæval hell, the avaricious drink of molten gold. There are those on earth in that hell now. As their money burns down the throat of their life it consumes their very heart.

¶ What is a thirsty man the better for the sight of a purling brook, or for dipping his finger in it, unless he drinks of it to quench his thirst? So it is with an avaricious man and his money: he sees and handles it, but his mind is no vessel to receive it, and so none the better for it. God made the soul only for Himself, and He alone can fill it.

Give the covetous man the treasure of the whole earth; let him not only possess but be rolling in wealth. Alas, the having of all this will but make him desire more. Nature is bounded, but imagination is infinite. It matters not what money is in the coffer, or what corn in the barn, to him who is only eager for what he has not, without reckoning what he already has. The world itself is too small for him whom the whole world cannot satisfy. If we did but consider the mischiefs that accompany great fortunes, we should soon conclude with the Apostle that covetousness is the root of all evil. Thence come frauds, wars, perjuries, treason, dissension, ambition, robberies, piracies, public tumults, domestic treacheries, corruptions in the judgment-seat.[1]

3. Above all, we thirst for *love*. There are those who seek the true, tender, and natural love. It is a noble thing to win. But it does not quench our thirst. Its waters speak of other waters of love, deeper and purer. If we think ourselves satisfied with personal love, we are lost to the highest love. Home love, sweetheart love, married love, ought to outreach themselves, to expand to wider love; or else their freshness, grace and charm depart. Love is of its nature infinite, and it seeks the Infinite. In the Infinite it is at home. And in that home all love is secured, animated, retains its morning charm, and lives an illimitable life. Its thirst is satisfied at last.

Others thirst for false love, for the pleasures of sensual appetite. We turn aside from the common, sweet meadows of natural and simple love, and long for the stormier lands, where we shall meet strange emotions, unknown experiences, sensations which excite, allure and thrill the heart—a life which will stir our languid pulse and kindle our exhausted flames. We satisfy for a time this curious thirst, and what is the result? The same thirst awakens again, a fiercer craving than before, till our very central being—for the Angel of Love whom we have degraded belongs to our deepest life—is attainted. Not only body and soul are consumed with this craving, but the spirit also—all that embraces imagination, beauty, and religion, worship of God, love of man—is dragged captive and degraded at the heels of our false desires.

Many other are the thirsts of men, and when, pursuing all and arriving at their waters, we find them salt, why then, at long last, the thirst for God awakes. 'In vain,' we cry, 'I have drunk at earthly wells; I have not made desire less but more. In vain have I tried to cool my heart; it burns as hotly as before. What is this unquenchable in me; what this eternal craving? Now and only now I know, or seem to know! It is the desire of the child for the Father; of the soul for its source; of the everlasting in me for the everlasting; of the timeless and the spaceless in me for the illimitable; of the dim sparks of the character of God in me for the immortal fire of His Being from whom they originally came. "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God." '

¶ That I want thee, only thee—let my heart repeat without end. All desires that distract

[1] John Bona (1609-1674).

me, day and night, are false and empty to the core.

As the night keeps hidden in its gloom the petition for light, even thus in the depth of my unconsciousness rings the cry—I want thee, I want thee.

As the storm still seeks its end in peace when it strikes against peace with all its might, even thus my rebellion strikes against thy love, and still its cry is—I want thee, only thee.[1]

¶ Thou mayest seek after honours, and not obtain them; thou mayest labour for riches, and yet remain poor; thou mayest dote on pleasures, and have many sorrows. But our God of His supreme goodness says, Whoever sought Me, and found Me not? whoever desired Me, and obtained Me not? whoever loved Me, and missed of Me? I am with him that seeks for Me: he hath Me already that wisheth for Me; and he that loveth Me is sure of My love.[2]

The Thirst for God.

Ps. xlii. 2.—'My soul thirsteth for God.'

The thirst for God is a term that is somewhat vague for those who do not feel it. It need not, however, be left vague. It is clear enough what it is. To thirst for God is to thirst for all that makes His character—and then for personal union with Him whose will creates that character.

1. The thirst for *knowledge* is a vital part of our thirst for God. All the work of the intellect belongs to Him. He is its source, and if He is the truth of things, He is its end. The more, then, we thirst for it, the more we thirst for God. We thirst, when we thirst for God, for a complete Being; for one who is not only righteousness and love, but also pure intelligence. To know by eager work those ideas of God on which the universe is based, and the discovery of which is science, that also is to thirst for God; and when religion interferes with or limits that thirst, it is, so far, not religion. To separate it from God or sacrifice it to an apparent spirituality is deviating from God Himself. For it is God whom we see and know when we gain a scientific truth, when we grasp one of the ideas on which the constitution of Nature is built. Every discovery of science which is proved true is a discovery of God. It hallows all knowledge to believe that. It adds to its infinity; and the spread of knowledge is one of the duties a Christian man owes to God and man.

¶ It is especially our duty to reveal the spirit of God in the things of science and of the practical life. Herein lies a new revelation, a new language, a direct symbolism. Science, just like art and music, can be materialistic—science can aim only at mechanical advancement and worldly wealth, which is not wealth at all—just as art can aim only at pleasure, desire, and drawing-room appreciation. But this need not be so. Certainly no one in a responsible position can teach science for long without the coming of the revelation of a new voice, a new method of expression, a new art—revealing quite changed standards of value, quite new significance of what we speak of as culture, beauty, love, justice. A new voice speaks to the souls of men and women calling for a new age with all its altered relationships and adventures of life.

With eyes opened to this new art you can wander through the science block and find in it all a new Bible, a new book of Genesis. So we believe. This is our duty and our faith. Into this Paradise have you been placed to dress it and to keep it.[1]

2. The thirst for *beauty* is the thirst for God. This in its fullness belongs chiefly to the artists of mankind, and in less fullness to those who can see and feel beauty, but not embody it. To desire, with unbroken faithfulness, to see more and more of loveliness in Nature, art, or human character; never to link our love of it with the ill desire of wealth or of

[1] Tagore.
[2] St. Augustine.

[1] H. G. Wells, *The Story of a Great Schoolmaster*, 59.

the world's applause; to strive to shape the beauty we conceive into some form which shall exalt or comfort men by the emotion of the perfect and illimitable which it awakens; to strive after not only the possible but that which seems impossible, not only the real but the ideal loveliness—that far-off image of perfection and harmony that flits before us—to thirst for that, and to follow it, as the hart panteth after the water brooks—that, too, is to thirst for God.

But what of those who cannot shape the beautiful, cannot thirst for it as the poet, the painter or the musician? A vast range of the beautiful is left for them; even for the most ignorant, the most untrained. It is to see all that is spiritually beautiful in man and humanity; to feel the Divine fairness in human tenderness, pity and self-sacrifice; to love Love wherever we meet her, and to know that she is lovely; to rejoice in man's doing of Duty, and to understand the Divine beauty in her eyes.

¶ The belief in beauty is part of our belief in God. The Universe strives after it as the realisation of His idea. Ugliness is to be striven against as a frustration of Heaven's plan. Beauty of character and beauty of form are essentially allied, and should be striven for as elements in the wholeness of life. Our communal life should be an intimate, harmonious blend of the spiritual and the material, each recognized as a portion of God's holiness. Their true union will produce a social structure whose enduring splendour shall be a reflex of the holy city, the heavenly Jerusalem, which John saw descending out of heaven from God.[1]

3. To thirst for God is to thirst for *righteousness,* for freedom from sin, with a hundredfold more desire than we have ever thirsted for wrong-doing. It is to be restless, and feel ourselves as exiles, so long as we do or cherish what we believe to be sin. It is to set every power of our nature to make our outward life clean and our inward thought pure. It is to cry to God, 'Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.' It is to obey the eternal law which grows not old, though our obedience subject our fortune to ruin, our fame to disrepute, and our body to suffering and death. It is to put into the desiring and doing of these things more intensity than we have ever put into the winning of an earthly love, nay, to sacrifice that love itself, if it lead us outside of righteousness. This is part of the thirst for God, and blessed are those who have it, or have begun to have it, for they shall be filled.

¶ Gipsy Smith tells how his father, Cornelius Smith thirsted for righteousness and was filled. In his caravan wanderings he arrived at a village where an evangelistic campaign was being held. He had already heard of God, and his thirst for Him had been growing. But now he resolved that he would not leave the village till that thirst was quenched. To ensure this he took the drastic step of selling his horse. Then night after night he listened to the Word, till at last he found the blessedness which he had so earnestly craved.

4. To thirst for God is to thirst for *justice,* and justice is righteousness in dealing with our fellow-men. It is never satisfied, if in anything we do we injure directly or indirectly the life or welfare of another. The tremendous demand *that* makes on all our business life, on all our lives as citizens, on all the ways by which we pursue wealth or pleasure or beauty or knowledge, is understood only when we begin to thirst for justice. It seems to lay its hand on everything we do; it challenges us to think always whether our actions or their aims will benefit or wrong mankind. Nor is that all. The thirst for justice demands that we should be sensitive to all oppression or injustice, feel our very heart smitten when we see it or hear of it, and shape our feeling into living work against it; and that, not only at home but abroad, not only in our nation, but, so far as we can, in every nation under the sun. This is to thirst

[1] *Selections from Brierley,* 274.

for God in the public life of the world of men, as citizens of our nation, as brothers in the vaster nation of mankind.

¶ Justice (as Jesus understands) is not the justice of man, it is not the obedience to human laws and codes and the respect due to customs and compromises established by man. In the language of the psalmists and the prophets the righteous man is he who lives according to the will of God, that is to say, of the supreme archetype of all perfection; not according to the law as set down by the Scribes and registered with all the subtle disingenuousness of the Pharisees, but according to the one and only law that Jesus epitomizes in a single commandment: 'Love all men, be they your neighbours or far removed from you, your fellow-countrymen or strangers, friends or enemies.' [1]

5. To thirst for God is to thirst for *truth*. We live in the midst of a horde of lies—false seemings which the world encourages in order that it may not be troubled; false standards of honesty in business, political arrangements and glozes which allow a man to play false with his conscience and his pledges; social appearances which are put on to cover our extravagance, our greed of accumulating, our reckless pleasure, our secret gambling, our secret impurity; religious seemings, apparent pieties in public, when our hearts are elsewhere; talk of the lips about creeds and sacraments and doctrines, the principles of which we violate; pretence that we believe this or that, so that we may keep our place in our society or our profession, when we do not believe a word of what we say; an atmosphere of falsehood which we breathe from day to day—and this is to thirst for the devil and not for God. Let us clear our soul and thirst for the truth. Let us desire it in the inward parts; and make our outward life, in business, in society, in trade, in the home, in religion, absolutely clear and honest, lucid as the waters of God's nature for which we desire, at which we hope to quench our thirst. This is to thirst for God.

[1] Giovanni Papini, *The Story of Christ*, 75.

¶ One of the crying needs of our day in our business, in our politics, in our social intercourse and in our religious life is for a deeper measure of sincerity. It is so easy to become like that character in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, Mr. Facing-both-ways, and to say one thing to a man's face and another thing behind his back. This type of insincerity is cultivated in some quarters of society almost as a fine art. You might imagine in some regions of society that transparency was the unpardonable sin. And yet what a treat it is to come across the character which is transparent, honest, genuine, guileless, sincere. We could do with more Nathanaels, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Have you ever considered the derivation of the word sincere. It comes from the Latin words *sine cera*. When Rome was mistress of the world and her grandees lived in marble palaces upon the banks of the Tiber, sculpture was one of the most prominent features of their costly furniture. Rome was stocked with works of Grecian art. Sometimes in the marble there were original flaws, or flaws caused by the chisel. These were filled by crafty workmen with a skilfully prepared composition of cement. At first it was imperceptible, but after a time the flaw became apparent. So frequently was the trick played that we find a clause often inserted in contracts of those times for the purchase of marble statuary to the effect that they must be *sine cera*. Perhaps these Latin words will come to mind as we sign ourselves 'yours sincerely,' and we must remember, too, that what we sign ourselves to one another we ought at least to be able to sign ourselves to God. We ought to be God's, sincerely, unreservedly, genuinely, with every flaw confessed, with every defect exposed. The first thing almost which Christ required in men and women was sincerity, and what He hated most was its opposite. Hypocrisy was the sin of sins in His eyes. . . . We have much need to pray in those beautiful words of *A Litany of Remembrance*, composed by the late Bishop of Southwell, 'From affectation and untruth, conscious or uncon-

scious, from pretence and acting a part which is hypocrisy, from impulsive self-adaptation to the moment in unreality to please persons or make circumstances easy, strengthen us to manly simplicity to be and be seen to be true; and from all false appearances save and help us, we humbly beseech Thee, O Lord.'[1]

6. There yet remains that in which all the rest are contained; there yet remains *love*, which moves the universe, and whose motion is God Himself To thirst to be at one with love, that is to thirst for the living God. Love in us is self-forgetfulness. To be able, when we live with our brother men, not to remember what we wish for ourselves, but only their wants, their joy and their sorrow; to think, not of our own desires, but of the great causes and the great conceptions which help mankind; to be eager to give pity to men, and forgiveness to their wrong; to desire to bind up the broken heart of man, and to realize our desire in act—this is to thirst for God as Love. For this is self-forgetfulness, and God is the absolute Self-forgetfulness. If we could but get into that essential energy of love, we should thirst no more.

O Life Everlasting, we thank Thee, we bless Thee,
Caress Thee,
Confess Thee,
And trust Thee for ever!

Oh, lift our endeavour to Thee, Everliving,
That, striving,
Life-giving,
We, we may receive Thee.

And ever enweave Thee in deeds love-enwoven,
And proven,
Uncloven,
Bright armour of glory!

Oh perfect the story Thy wisdom desireth,
Inspireth
And fireth,
In clay of Thy making!

[1] *A Memoir of Malcolm Archibald*, 157.

For we, Lord, partaking of Thee, Uncreated,
Are fated,
Unsated,
To thirst with deep passion.

Until Thou canst fashion the seed to a flower—
Empower
And dower
Each soul with Thy beauty—

Thro' stern grief and duty, the life in us lifting,
Yet sifting
And gifting
With Godhead immortal;—

Till Thou, thro' the portal called death, gently leading,
Still heeding,
Yet speeding,
Wilt, suddenly turning—

Those arms wide with yearning round each of us casting—
Feast love, that was fasting,
With love everlasting,
O Life, Love, God, Father![1]

A Living God.

Ps. xlii. 2.—'My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?'

1. The soul longs for a *personal* God; for it is not an idea we want—a sentiment, or a gigantic conception of law. Man cannot rest in these. The soul cannot be fed on philosophical abstractions, or the living spirit be satisfied with a scientific system. Man *will* go farther; he wants to know what there is behind system—behind law—behind shadowy abstractions. The soul thirsts for a will, a mind, a person, behind the very remotest conception of law, of force, of Nature; and so undeniable and awful is this longing of the soul, that it will cling to any being, rather

[1] Annie Matheson, *Maytime Songs*, 11.

than be without a person to trust in and obey. And when nothing better remains to be done; when philosophy and speculation, and wit, and wisdom have spent themselves, and have nothing more to say, the restless souls of even the polished Athenians will force them to build an altar 'to the unknown God.' Yes! and better so; better even to be an old Norse pagan, who believed in his rough way that he saw gods everywhere, than to lose our hold of a personal God at the bidding of a vain philosophy that would resolve the grand conception of the Eternal into a catalogue of scientific terms.

When we have climbed the highest peak of materialism, and scaled its loftiest height;—when, at its bidding, we have got beyond what it calls the narrow faiths and shallow hopes of the world; when we have reduced everything to a gigantic system of force and dead necessity; when we have dethroned the Infinite Spirit, put away His paternal face, banished His kingly throne, and proved that the universe is nothing but a passionless machine that works because it cannot help it—when we have done all this, and have fallen back on the elaborate syllogisms of some Gospel according to the materialist, what have we gained? Is the great and solemn mystery of life any clearer? Does the little daisy's beauty tell us more, when it tells us no more of God? Do the splendid hosts of Heaven discourse more eloquently when they have nothing behind them that they only foreshadow or reveal? Has anything that was shrouded in gloom before grown brighter now? Is one single sorrow of the world healed, one mystery solved, one long-enslaving sin banished? Do man's hopes and anxieties resolve themselves into a calmer, sublimer coherency when no Immortal Will is known? Are the hearts of men knit together in a closer bond of strength and concord in the absence of a Father-God? Does it make this chequered life plainer to say it *must* be than to say it is *meant* to be?—to tell man he is the product of inexorable law than to confess he is the child of an infinite Love? Does it bring us any nearer to the great secret of the hidden life of all things? No! 'My soul thirsteth for *God;*' it presses beyond all these systems and abstractions, to find a voice to answer to its eager call.

¶ Let us see how the longing for a personal God affected men like John Addington Symonds. Symonds was a choice spirit. Scholarly, of high ideals, having a nature sensitive to excess, artistic, affectionate, analytical to the point of the sceptical, and yet deeply religious, he was just the man to develop into Agnosticism, but at the same time to be daily torn in pieces by misgivings as to whether there might not be a personal Supreme One in the Universe after all. 'Emotionally,' says his biographer, 'he desired the warmth of a personal God: intellectually he could conceive that God under human attributes only, and found himself driven to say "no" to each human presentment of Him.'

The result was that throughout his mature life Symonds never had peace. The struggle between his religious instinct, which was kept in leash, and his intellectual faculty, which he made the whole of his life to humour and serve, is visible throughout his biography.

At twenty-seven years of age (1867) we find him saying, 'I would give a great deal to regain the Christian point of view, or rather, since all modern people are ethically Christian—the personal, creative, conscious Deity. But I nowhere find Him. I see that this age has no definition of Him.'

When he turned to the Universe to gather evidence there whereby to frame some idea of the Supreme One for himself, he could only discover in it 'an appalling solitude.'

And yet this was his feeling—'My human weakness (such was his interpretation of his best human strength) clamours for a personal God, and for some assurance of either immortality or annihilation.'

And then comes an Agnostic's judgment upon Agnosticism—'It is the indefinite which is so cruel, the perpetual "perhaps" which will not be dismissed.'[1]

2. But the thought of the confession of the text goes deeper. The soul rests not until it

[1] H. Lewis, *Modern Rationalism*, 393.

can think of God and know Him as the *living* God. 'My soul thirsteth for God, for the *living* God.' Not only a Person, but an all-pervading Life, a living God here and now. Not the God of the fathers and the neglecter of the sons: not the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, of David also and of the prophets, and the forgetter of the seekers of modern times; but our God, our living God of to-day. Men hunger and thirst to be told that God is not an absent God—working by proxy, by dead laws, and unconscious force; that the wells of His salvation are not exhausted yet; that He who spake by the mouth of the prophets in ancient times has still His chosen ones; that the power of the Eternal Spirit over the human heart is not yet at an end, and that He who taught David to praise, and Isaiah to prophecy, and Jesus to love, and Paul to preach, is not far from any one of *us*.

Men need nothing now so much as they need the feeling and the sense of a living God—a God who not only walked in Eden once, but who visits our streets and meadows now; the God of whom Jesus loved to speak—who marks the sparrow's fall and the lily's bloom, who holds up our little lives and says the word to us when we have served His purpose here. We crave a living God, who is more real than our poor dreams, and more certain than our dim fancies; a God to whom we may go when our fair hopes are dimmed and our day-dreams die away before our eyes; who will be with us when we kiss dying lips and closing eyes, and bid good-bye to the gifts that we had come to dream were ours for evermore. Yes! a living God amid dying men, in the shelter of whose love our sore-beaten hearts may find a little rest, and in the strength of whose constancy our bewildered spirits may recover from the dreadful sense of human frailty and mortal change—a *living* God.

Poor Heart, there is but One can comfort thee,
I say it, I who know; ah, hearken, thou!
Draw near to Him, nearer than ever now!
It is thy God! He waits for the least spark
Of faith, of love, least reaching through the dark
To His kind arms; 'tis not one step to go,
'Tis but to lift thy weeping eyes and lo,
His face of Love!

Thy Saviour, thine!
Friend of all friends, Who needeth but the lift
Of the trembling heart to Him, to answer swift,
Swifter than thought, grief's inarticulate cry,
From His great heart of Human sympathy;
Oh, Weeper, though from out thy life to-day,
All joy, all hope, all friends he put away,
This Friend remaineth, and He shall suffice
Saviour and King, High Priest and Sacrifice;
The Friend Divine![1]

3. What need, then, to ask: 'When shall I come and appear before God?' We are before Him *now;* our spirits are ever in His presence, night and day. What a thought for a busy, toil-worn man! What a thought for any anxious, burdened spirit! Believing it, we should go down to our daily work as to daily sacrament and daily prayer, for in our ears would ever sound the whisper of the Master: 'Son, go work to-day in my vineyard.' Then, daily work would be more than daily toil for profit or success; a deeper meaning and a diviner calling would discover themselves beneath the meanest task; and we should see, with what new delight! that the common place of work, and the common ways of duty, are aglow with heavenly splendour. For when God is known as a living God, His love is known as a living love, and His will as a living will. Then is He no longer feebly apprehended by the faltering hand of a distant hope, but strongly known by the grasp of a mighty faith. Then He ceases to be the object of a fond expectancy, and becomes the possession of a present joy. We no longer look for God *to be* revealed; He *is* revealed. And we 'walk' with Him.

[1] Mrs. Muriel E. George, *The Garden of Comfort*, 7.

The Contempt of Unbelief.

Ps. xlii. 3.—'They continually say unto me, Where is thy God?'

Missionaries tell us that the severest strain upon their faith and the most exhausting tax upon their strength come not from articulate opposition, but from the immovable contradiction of surrounding circumstances, from the silent but invincible scorn of an arrogant and contented paganism. Of course, there is an element of bitterness added when the atmosphere does become articulate with the scornful unbelief of living beings. 'Where is thy God? You are of another creed than ours. You are an exile. Your very exile is a proof of your God's futility. The stars in their courses are fighting against you. You have neither lot nor part in our worship. Our costly idols and gorgeous temples are nothing to you. You scorn them. But we scorn you. You are a captive in our hands. The living present contradicts your faith. Where is thy God?' Such scorn has ever been a feature of the ages of persecution.

¶ In the Diocletian persecution (one of the fiercest that ever raged against the Christian faith) two brothers, Crispin and Crispinian, who suffered torture and death, felt the stab of this challenge. For love of their Lord they had renounced the honours of their birth, and given themselves to the making of shoes for the poor. In the hours of torture these words were on their lips, 'Help us, O God of our Salvation, for the glory of Thy name. Wherefore should the heathen now say, Where is thy God?' as if the sharpest of their pangs were the scornful unbelief of their foes.

1. No vital faith in God is saved from the challenge. The godless are not perplexed by it. But is that matter for congratulation or for fear? Sincere Christian faith whose pulse beats strongly, whose universe is always vocal, insistent, alive, is bound to face the full force of the attack.

Where is thy God? is asked by the crude materialist, as if he understood God to be a substance that could be weighed and measured in a chemist's scales. Where is thy God? is the question of the pure rationalist, as if no credence could possibly be given to a faith that could not be proved by mathematical formulæ. Where is thy God? asks the secularist reformer, who sees neither use nor meaning in our faith, and rules out our religion unless we can produce the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth within the swift hours of a winter's afternoon. That peculiar type of cynicism which is the product of our remarkable age is also very solicitous with this question. For it has persuaded itself that if ever a God did walk through human history, He is now either asleep or dead. And sometimes with no touch of cynicism in it the question comes wistfully from a reverent agnosticism that seems to have learned so much of life's greatness and yet has not learned faith. Where is thy God? Is it not the burdened and agonized, sometimes the angry and resentful question, that comes from the monotony of fate—the passing of the generations, the unfailing store of sorrow and trouble and care? Oh! the taunt is only too frequent, persistent and merciless.

But perhaps the worst form of it and the most unsettling is that which comes from our scornful scepticism about ourselves. It is a memorable day in the life of every Christian man and woman when they compel themselves to ask themselves, with bowed heads, Where is thy God? Amid the pleasures and preoccupations that absorb you, where is thy God? Is it possible that He is lurking somewhere invisible? Is He anywhere in all thy thoughts? In your anxieties, where is thy God? Is He submerged, forgotten, unavailing? In your character, where is thy God? Is there any quality or grace, any fortitude or hope, that might not have been there if His glory had never touched you? Plato has said that 'God the Father and Creator of the universe is difficult to find, and when found is impossible to impart to all.' If that be the whole truth, then we shall be subject to the scourge of this taunt all our days.

2. But there is an answer. It is an answer that is adequate to every open and sincere heart. It is not, indeed, an answer that can satisfy people who demand an outward demonstration, people who never listen to the imperative of conscience and the whisperings within their own soul. But it is a deep, sure, intimate answer to all who will cease from the babblings of unreality and be still as those who would hear the Infinite speak. We can never improve upon the answer that this taunted Psalmist gives. It is twofold.

(1) First he says, 'I remember.' And with the words he picks up the threads of history. There have been other days that were not days of dereliction, and scorn. He recalls a day of joyful religious festival. He lives over again the crowded moments that brought impulse and uplift. The memory of the sainted and mighty dead warms and cheers his spirit. He is linked still to a great comradeship. He may be in exile, but he is no isolated, orphaned soul. The immortal past belongs to him. The faith of generations gone is like a tide about him. The triumphant lives that stood for righteousness and cheerfully encountered sacrifice, that kept their holy trust, in days of cloud and dread—they are his. 'I remember,' and the white core of all his storied memories is God.

¶ 'But I remembered,' says Jeanie Deans, after she had been delivered, on that memorable journey, from the hands of the ruffians on Gunnersby Hill, 'my worthy father's tales of a winter evening, how he was confined with the blessed martyr, Mr. James Renwick, who lifted up the fallen standard of the true reformed Kirk of Scotland after the worthy and renowned Daniel Cameron, our last blessed bannerman, had fallen among the swords of the wicked at Airsmoss, and how the very hearts of the wicked malefactors and murderers, whom they were confined withal, were melted like wax at the sound of their doctrine: and I bethought mysell, that the same help that was wi' them in their strait, wad be wi' me in mine, an' I could but watch the Lord's time and opportunity for delivering my feet from their snare; and I minded the Scripture of the blessed Psalmist, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God." ' That is the answer. The whole inheritance of a spiritual past is a witness to our God. He has been everywhere with the faithful; He will be everywhere with them still.

(2) But there is another element in the answer. We have it in the great phrase, 'He is the God of my life.' It is very remarkable that this exile does not retort with a specific reply: 'Here is my God,' or, 'There is my God.' His argument for God is not in one event of life or in a hundred events, but in the very warp and woof of life itself. The taunt falls shattered, not from the shield of faith, but from the very structure and constitution of his life. This man can never explain himself if God be ruled out; he cannot think of life apart from this strange, gracious, mighty hand that has been upon him. He cannot disentangle life from God. Every holy desire that ever stirred in him, his dearest hopes, the most priceless possessions of his heart, life, character—none of these were his but for the arms that encircled him, the God that made him His worshipper and friend. That is the supreme demonstration of God, for God demonstrates Himself, writes His witness ineffaceably upon the soul of His follower, interweaves with his personality and history something of His Divine mind and purpose. It is not without reason that the profoundest of the Apostles records the words of our Lord, 'Abide in me, and I in you.' That is not a mystic illusion. It is the foundation of the Christian life. Far more intimately than this Psalmist could dream of knowing, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus—who has since added to history a Cross, an empty sepulchre, the dispensation of the Spirit, and the Saviour who by all these is made perfect Captain of our salvation—becomes the God of our life, if we will have it so—a God inseparable from all our spiritual fortunes, a God who is for ever the penitent exile's home.

3. And so the taunt recoils upon the mockers. 'Where is thy God?' they ask us. But we can well answer, Where is thy God? What pitiful folly are you exalting to the place of God? What pallid illusion are you pursuing? Every man has his god—if not from the skies, then of the dust, brutish or Divine. Where is thy god and whither does he lead you? What has he done for you? Has he made you, or have you made him? 'They that make them are like unto them.' It is surely permissible for those whose God is the God of their life to make their own the Divine scorn of another Psalmist's words. 'I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the pavilions of wickedness.' I had rather catch a glimpse once in a thousand years of the majesty and grace of the Lord Christ than be of them that squander life in indolence or gaiety, and leave it at the last a tragedy of fruitless shame.

But our retort cannot end with scorn. It must end with a gospel. We have seen that it is not men who are to demonstrate God, but God who is to demonstrate Himself. And here comes the solemn, glorious sequel, so personal, so exacting, but so splendid. God and His Christ are to demonstrate Themselves through us. We can never replace, can never ignore the quiet, persistent, healthful influence of a devoted Christian life. In so far as it bears Christ within it, it is part of the great evangel, and no witness can exceed it in shattering false ideals, or quickening human pulses, in the power of unveiling the very face of God. If God be amongst us, we must show Him forth; and that is the whole problem of Christian service.

¶ An incident, which, I believe, is absolutely authentic, tells of a native catechist in one of the northern tribes of India who was dismissed from mission service for some incapacity. Years afterwards a lady missionary gathered around her in a remote village a group of people, and told them in the simplest fashion the story of Jesus. She spoke of His love for the children, His sympathy with the weak, His healing grace, His Divine genius for kindness. She was surprised to find that her recital was followed with wonderful and intimate appreciation. But her surprise must have gone beyond all speech when someone in the crowd said, 'We know Him quite well. He has been among us for years.' It seems there are bigger things even than missionary societies. The grace of God had taken the dismissed catechist and made him such a Christian in that village that men saw in him the radiance which is Christ. 'Where is thy God?' Does He need a better witness than can be found in such lives?[1]

Depression.

Ps. xlii. 5.—'Why art thou cast down, O my soul?'

It is one source of the eternal freshness of the Psalms that they tell the story of a struggling soul. They open a window on to that battlefield with which no other battlefield can be compared—the moral struggle of the individual with himself. And it is well that that story should be told in poetry. There is nothing like poetry for describing battles. For there is a rich suggestiveness in poetry, a rush of emotion, an enthusiasm, that catches and conveys the excitement of the field. The dullest war-correspondent grows poetical, his words become coloured, vivid, picturesque, when he narrates the actions in the war. It was right, then, that for this warfare of the soul we should have the strong music of the Psalms.

As we read the story of the Psalmist's struggle, one of the first things to arrest us is the likeness of that battle to our own. We are so apt to think we fight alone. We are so prone to think there never was a life so weak, so ragged, so full of a dull gnawing, as ours. We are so ready to believe that we have suffered more than any heart that ever loved and lost. And then God opens up the heart of the Psalmist, and we see its failures and we hear its cries, and the sense of loneliness at least is gone. He prayed as we have prayed.

[1] A. Connell, *The Endless Quest*, 38ff.

He fell as we have fallen. He rose and started again as we have done. He was disheartened, and so are we.

What are the causes of spiritual depression?

1. One cause of spiritual depression is *physical weakness.* Body and soul are so interdependent that by some their proper identity is confused, and they are regarded as only different conditions or aspects of the same nature and life. This, however, is to ignore the most manifest distinction and contrast in the universe. For matter and mind are two entirely different orders of existence, and their laws belong to utterly diverse realms. Nevertheless, they are susceptible of very delicate inter-relations, and capable of the freest and most vigorous mutual interplay and association. This being so, we need not wonder that, to a large extent, they share each other's fortunes. Thus, when the bodily health is vigorous and exuberant, the mind works more strongly, the tides of feeling set with fuller and richer flow, and the whole tone of the soul's life is more buoyant and hopeful. In like manner, when the physical frame is debilitated, and the nerves are unstrung, there is apt to be a spiritual co-partnership of suffering, the emotional life being lowered, the imagination morbid, and all the course of thought tinged with gloom.

Now if physical weakness be the secret of our spiritual depression, the only effectual cure is to aim at strengthening the bodily health. And we ought not to weaken the body still more by fretting over a lowness of spirits which results from our feeble physical condition almost as inevitably as loss of light follows from the setting of the sun. For it is our 'spirits,' and nothing more (or less) important, that are impaired; and they are only the surface feelings of the soul, not the essential principles of our spiritual life. We ought, therefore, to banish utterly the thought that our religion itself is wrong. Above all, we ought not to allow the thought that God is angry with us on this account. That is as little likely as that a true mother would be angry with a sick child.

¶ I wish you wouldn't think I am such a saint. You seem to imagine that I have no ups and downs, but just a level and lofty stretch of spiritual attainment with unbroken joy and equanimity. By no means! I am often perfectly wretched and everything appears most murky. I often feel as though my religious life had only just begun, and that I am in the kindergarten stage. But I can usually trace these miserable seasons to some personal cause, and the first thing to do is to attend to that cause, and get into the sunshine again.[1]

2. Another cause of spiritual depression, and of course aggravated in effect when conjoined with the former, is *a constitutional tendency to look on the darker side of things.* All life is, humanly speaking, a balance of probabilities. In everything that concerns our welfare there are possibilities of success and possibilities of failure. Thus there is almost always something to encourage and please, and something to discourage and depress. To a sanguine nature life shows its brighter aspect, and the more hopeful and encouraging elements appear in strong relief. But to others the difficulty and danger of life present themselves more strongly. They forebode the evil rather than anticipate and greet the good.

Now, if it is a constitutional tendency to look on the dark side of things that has to answer for the gloomy hue of our religion, the obvious remedy is to look on the brighter aspect. We look to ourselves, and find no comfort there; or to our surroundings, and they do but prophesy and threaten evil. Let us, then, 'run with patience the race that is set before us, *looking unto Jesus'* (Heb. xii. 1, 2)—'looking away' unto Jesus, as the word properly signifies, *i.e.*, away from self, and from all that would dishearten and dismay, to Him who is light, and in whom 'is no darkness at all' (1 Jn. i. 5).

3. Again, a too fruitful source of religious depression consists in *the misapprehension of certain spiritual truths.* Our views of God's

[1] *J. H. Jowett*, 290.

character may be grievously wrong. We regard Him as harsh, stern, and exacting. He is more a Taskmaster than a Father, ready to detect the slightest failure, and quick to upbraid us for the least offence. Thus the very atmosphere of the spiritual life is vitiated, and where we should find inspiration and abounding joy we are in peril of poisoning our soul's health and stifling all wholesome gladness. Or our views of conversion may be wrong. One rigid type may be present to our minds, either from its more frequent presentation in religious biography, or from its prevalence in the thoughts and talk of those Christians with whom we have most to do. And measuring our own conversion by this familiar type, and finding that in many respects it does not correspond, we are apt to conclude that in our case there must have been something sadly wrong; perhaps we even surmise that we were never really converted at all. In like manner, we may have wrong views of the course and complexion of religious experience, measuring ourselves by others, or trying to coerce our thoughts and feelings into conformity to an imaginary standard. And when we find that much that we supposed to be properly symptomatic of the normal spiritual life is either wanting in our case, or shows what seem to be aberrations from the assumed standard, we are apt to conclude that our spiritual experience, if not delusive, is at least very defective. We may also have wrong views of the nature and claims of ethical uprightness. This may assume to us the character of a rigid externality, and its demands may be minutely, even trivially, exacting; until all our life becomes a bondage, as we ask ourselves morbidly, in the presence of every possibility of action, or speech, or thought, 'Is this right?' Thus, while physical weakness prepares the way generally for spiritual depression, and a constitutional tendency of temperament predisposes us to those thoughts which foster it, these wrong views of religious truth are directly and immediately provocative of despondency and gloom.

¶ A story that Joshua Rowntree was particularly fond of telling, to encourage all who might be tempted by depression, related to a certain Luke Cock, a ministering Friend who once became very low about his own spiritual condition: and the devil told him no other minister was ever like that! So he set off early one morning to ride to Hutton-le-Hole (near Kirby Moorside), where lived (and died in 1753) his great friend and colleague in the ministry, John Richardson, whom he questioned as to how he was. The reply was that as to the body he was very well; as to the pocket he was very comfortable; 'but if thou mean as to best things, I never was worse, *never* was worse!' Luke Cock threw up his hat and shouted, 'The devil's a leear! the devil's a leear! and I was a fool to believe him!' and at once turned round and rode home rejoicing.[1]

Deep Unto Deep.

Ps. xlii. 7.—'Deep calleth unto deep.'

The Forty-second Psalm was obviously written by a man who was in trouble. His trouble seems to have been exile; and the bitterness of the exile consisted in this, that it separated him from Jerusalem and its Temple and its worship.

The place of exile was apparently in the hilly trans-Jordanic country. From there he could look down towards the west and south in the direction of Jerusalem, and remember how he went with the multitude to the house of God. At the thought of the privileges that once were his, but are his now no longer, a great sea of pity seems to surge over him. The particular imagery of the text is suggested, the commentaries say, by the scenery of the district in which he sojourned. When the snows of Hermon melt the rocks are covered with foaming cascades, and the impetuous Jordan becomes a roaring torrent. These floods call out to one another. 'Deep calleth unto deep,' and makes the echoes ring. So it seems to the Psalmist as if one flood of trouble called to another flood of trouble with the intent of overwhelming him and swallowing him up.

[1] S. E. Robson, *Joshua Rowntree*, 154.

That may be the sense in which the Psalmist first used the words, but they may convey another suggestion, quite a different one, namely this, that it is to the deepest in man that the deep things of our gospel call, and that until the depths of human nature are touched the deep things of God make their appeal in vain.

Are you ever troubled by the thought of the indifference and unconcern of such a vast proportion of our population? Seventy-five per cent., we are told, of our male population are outside our churches. Men will spend much money and travel long distances to see a football match, but they neglect and ignore the Church of Christ even when it is planted at their very doors.

This indifference would not be so puzzling if we reckoned religion to be a matter of taste, just as love of music or love of painting is a matter of taste. We should account for it on those lines by saying that the great majority of our people had no taste for religion. But we cannot say that. We believe that the human soul everywhere is athirst for God, the living God. We believe that man really cannot live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. We believe in Augustine's familiar word, that God has made man for Himself, and that he is restless until he finds his rest in God. It is in view of this belief of ours that man is 'so made' (to use Dr. Dale's word) that he must seek God and love Him, that the sheer indifference of such multitudes seems so mysterious and staggering. They seem to feel no want of God at all. They ignore Him, and are conscious apparently of no lack.

What are we to make out of it all? Must we abandon our belief that the need of God is instinctive, intuitive, universal? Must we confess that we have been mistaken in our belief that man was made for God? Such questions are forced upon every thinking Christian by the condition of things in the midst of which we find ourselves.

Now this text suggests the real reason for the prevailing indifference. There is no need for us to recant our faith that man is made for God. But it is to the 'deep' things in man that the deep things of God make their appeal. And the average man is not living 'deeply.' He is living on the surface, he is living among the shallows. The depths in him have never been broken up. And to the man living amongst superficialities and shallows the deep things of the gospel of God make no appeal. In 'listening in' each broadcasting station has its own wave length, and an instrument must be tuned to that particular wave length if any messages are to be received. It is much like that with this human nature of ours. If God's voice is to be heard there must be some correspondence between God and the soul. The deep calls of the gospel are necessarily unheard by the man of shallow soul. If there is no corresponding and responsive deep, the deep things of God make no appeal.

Human nature seems built in strata. The New Testament writers mention three such strata—flesh, soul, spirit. Of these the flesh is the surface stratum, and the spirit represents the deep.

There are some who seem to live wholly in that surface stratum. They live, as the Apostle puts it, 'in the flesh.' They live on that level a merely physical, sensuous life, and living on that level it is sensuous things that appeal. They mind the things of the flesh. They are wholly occupied with the superficial pleasures and concerns of life. They eat and drink and make merry and make money, as if that were the whole of life.

There are others who live in the soul as well as in the flesh. That is to say, they live not simply in the region of the senses, they live in the region of the intellect and the mind. They feel the appeal of the beautiful. They are sensitive to the glories of Nature. They respond to the splendours of literature and art. It is a much fuller life than the merely sensuous one which such multitudes are content to live. They dwell more deeply who dwell in the soul as well as in the flesh.

But there is a deep below that deep, and the depths of human nature are not sounded except by those who dwell in the spirit. It

is to the spirit in man that the gospel makes its appeal. It is at that depth that there is really correspondence between man and God. It is when we live at that depth that we hear the call of God and make response. So long as men live on the level of the flesh, or even of the flesh and soul, they may be indifferent to God, but the spirit of man is the candle of the Lord. Spirit with spirit can meet. God, who is spirit, makes His appeal to the spirit of man.

What does the stress which modern psychology lays on the subconscious mean but this, that there are depths in every man of which neither he himself nor his neighbours may be aware? And in those depths there is a deep which answers to the call of God. It may not be obvious, but in everyone it exists—some spiritual instinct that hungers after God, the living God. 'If you'll only cut deep enough,' said a French soldier in the Napoleonic wars to the surgeons who were operating upon him, 'you'll find the name of the Emperor!' And if you will only cut deep enough into human nature, you will find upon it the name of God.

Again, according to the new psychology almost anything may open up the depth of that mysterious subconscious in which all kinds of instincts and aspirations, hunger and thirst, lie hidden. A word, a memory, a casual happening—anything may do it. But there are certain special things which do it more often and more effectively than anything else. They open up the deep within us, and out of these deeps we cry unto the Lord. And to us in these deeps the deep things of the gospel make their appeal.

Let us take four of them!

1. *Peril.*—The consciousness of peril will often open up the deeps of human nature, and then God becomes the supreme need.

We have illustration after illustration of this in the old Book. The Israelites in the days of prosperity were constantly forgetting God, but when peril threatened they flew to God as their one and only resource. 'Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble.' The threat of peril, again and again has shaken people out of their superficiality and shallowness, and revealed life as a thing of mighty and vast consequences, and has made men think of God.

¶ Our own recent history will furnish us with illustrations. I happened to be looking through my desk the other day, and I came across a pamphlet, published by the *Scotsman,* which narrated what happened in a certain parish church in the opening days of the war. What happened in that Scots kirk was this: everybody came to pray. There was such a congregation as had not been seen for years. People who had not attended public worship for years were to be seen in the pews. Even one man who rather prided himself upon being a freethinker was there. In the presence of the peril that menaced the nation, all men felt their need of God. All of a sudden life had become deep, tragic, tremendous, and God got His chance. Deep called unto deep. In that stupendous hour the most frivolous and careless person knew that his supreme need was God. Out of that depth they cried unto the Lord.

2. *Sorrow and loss.*—These do it for the individual oftener perhaps than anything else. They open up the great deeps, and the Lord gets His response.

We may think we are quite happy in the enjoyment of material goods and intellectual pleasures so long as all goes well, and our children are about us, and our family circles are unbroken. But what can the material comfort of life or even its intellectual pleasures do for us when in the presence of some great affliction the soul sits dumb? What can they do to help us to bear it? What hope or healing can they give us? They may serve to distract us for a space, but we are living at too deep a level for intellectual interest to be able to comfort and heal us. Our hurt is too sore for anyone save God to cure. Out of the depths of sorrow and loss and bereavement men cry unto the Lord: God gets His chance. In the great words of the gospel about resurrection and life, about the Father's house of

many mansions, about the building of God, the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, which we have when this earthly house is taken down, we find our help and healing.

3. *The sense of sin.*—This is another depth out of which men cry to God. Although people tell us in these days that the sense of sin has to a large extent passed away, if we care to look into the depths of our hearts we shall find there this sense of shortcoming which rebukes and condemns us. We know that we have sinned and come short of the glory of God. We know that if God were strict to mark iniquity, then none of us could stand. We may, so long as we live on the worldly level, be fairly satisfied with ourselves. We pass muster in society. Our reputations are unimpeachable. No breath of slander has dimmed our fair fame. When we compare ourselves with our fellows we are as good as most, and better than some: but when we bring ourselves into the light of Christ we know, as Peter knew, that we are sinful men. Our own hearts condemn us, and to us in our shame and contrition nothing appeals save the deep things of the gospel, the announcement of God's love and grace in Jesus Christ.

It was out of that depth of conscious shortcoming that the Psalmist wrote who began his Psalm: 'Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord!' He was burdened, haunted, oppressed by his sin, and there was only one refuge for him. 'I wait for the Lord: my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul looketh for the Lord more than watchmen look for the morning, yea, more than watchmen look for the morning. For with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption.' Down in that depth, when he saw the tremendous issues of life, when he realized its solemnity and sanctity and knew himself a sinner, only God's great words about mercy and redemption met his need.

Sooner or later we all get there: if not before, then we get there when we stand in the light of eternity, and when we get there nothing but the deep words of the gospel will meet our case.

¶ 'Is there anything you want that you haven't got?' asked a clergyman of a sick man he was visiting. He was thinking specially of some delicacy for the sick-room. And the man turning great wistful eyes upon him said:

'Sir, I want the forgiveness of sins!'

We shall all want it some day. We need it now: we shall want it some day, and then the deep and wondrous gospel of the Cross will be our hope and comfort.

4. *The sense of Eternity.*—Once again, the great deeps of life may be broken up by the swift passage of time and the sudden invasion of the sense of eternity.

The superficial, shallow life is really what Plato called an unexamined life. Men live it only because they have not really thought about it. The people who live for the world and its things, for pleasure or for wealth, have really never reasoned things out. They have never seriously faced the issues of life, and so long as men can shut their eyes to the real nature and issues of life they may feel no need of God, and the deep things of the gospel may make no appeal to them. But they cannot live in this shallow, thoughtless way for ever. Sometimes the mere flux of time wakens them to the tremendous fact that this world is not their home. Sometimes the death of a friend reminds them in startling fashion that they are pilgrims and sojourners on the earth, as all their fathers were. We realize with a start that one day the place that knows us now will know us no more. And then out of the depths of the sense of our own mortality we cry to God. There is no refuge for us but God. From the burdening sense of our frailty we shelter ourselves in God's eternity. Great words like that of St. Paul, 'For I am persuaded that neither death nor life . . . shall be able to separate us from the love of God,' appeal to us then. The soul rebels against the thought of death. It wants life, it cries out for life, and only the mighty gospel of the risen Christ can meet its need.

I can quite understand that to the young and strong the gospel of a hereafter should make little appeal. It is the gospel that meets the deepest need of the man whose hair is whitening, and whose strength is failing, and whose sun is westering. That man responds to such a gospel as this: 'Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.' Men are able to contemplate death and eternity with quietness and confidence only as they are able to say, 'The eternal God is my refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.'

'Deep calleth unto deep.' It does not call to the shallows—or at any rate, the shallows do not respond. These deeps are in every man, though they may be unrevealed. In the most frivolous and indifferent and heedless of men these deeps exist. And that is why we dare hope for every man. Deep down in every human heart is the need for God. Enshrined in every human personality is the hunger for God. God, so to speak, is in the very texture of human nature. It was made for Him, and cannot do without Him. Cut deep enough, and in every human soul we shall find stamped God's name.[1]

'Deep calls to deep':—man's depth would be despair
But for God's deeper depth: we sow to reap.
Have patience, wait, betake ourselves to prayer:
Deep answereth deep.[2]

The Villainy of the World.

Ps. xliii. 1.—'Judge me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation: O deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man.'

We are far removed from the age in which this cry of the spirit was uttered; it is impossible to regain the point of view of the singer; but we can catch in his words the cry which rings out to-day, the same by the River Thames as by the rivers of Babylon, or on the mountains of Hermon. The world described in the Psalm was the world which met awakened souls in Israel. This is the kind of world, these are the experiences which still meet the soul when God awakens it.

1. First, the soul discovers itself to be in a hostile world. 'Plead my cause against an ungodly nation. . . . O deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man . . . why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?' The Psalmist finds himself in a nation that ignores God and transgresses His law; there is no truth-dealing, no justice, no mercy in many of his own people; there is cruelty, active against all that is loyal to God. This is the dark background, known by all the Psalmists. Few are the faithful; many and cruel are the foes. The songs of praise ring out from the wild discords of the ungodly. It is not from Philistia, or Moab, or Edom the danger comes; but from those within Israel who have passed God by. The soul shrinks and cries, 'O deliver me.'

The soul will make the same discovery still. This is a world in which much that is hostile to the life of God within the soul will meet it at the very outset of the new life. Not ignorance, not indifference, but rebellion! In the first freshness of the new day the soul reads the beauty of God into all things; all that is human has a borrowed glory. Then with a shock of surprise the facts of the world strike the soul. It discovers the enemy. Full of the amazing reality, and dazed by the unearthly vision of God, the soul beholds this strange spectacle, a nation without God. The soul, eager to do justly and love mercy, finds itself in the presence of the deceitful and unjust, who are not content to leave the faithful alone, but oppress them with merciless cruelty. His gain he will have to defend. His way will not be that of a pilgrim, clothed in festal garments, but a march through a country invested by foes—a journey in which every inch of the way must be won by conflict. It is a critical and sorrowful hour when the soul must put on the sword and mail and lay aside its festal garments, when the way is

[1] J. D. Jones.
[2] Christina G. Rossetti.

discovered to be full of peril, and songs are hushed.

2. With this discovery the soul may discover also its own weakness, its vulnerable defences, its insufficiency. We go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy. The spring and delight desert us. Weariness and failure threaten us. We are an easy target. We are easily cast down. We discover in the shock of the first discovery another no less important—the limits of our own powers of resistance, the poor condition of our defences. The depression which follows is a common experience in the lives of the saints.

'The toils and conflicts that followed,' wrote a great servant of God, 'were light in comparison with the anguish of that first plunge into the full realization of the villainy there is in the world—the dread of being called to oppose it. I fled from the face of the Lord!' The depression may be the divinely-appointed experience whereby the soul faces its own limitations. It is better to learn early the insufficiency of our powers in face of the terror of the enemy. It is better that egotism should be slain; it must be slain some day; and this is one way whereby it may be wounded. 'Despair is the disillusion of egotism.' John Newton wrote in one of the Olney hymns:

I asked the Lord that I might grow
In faith and love and every grace;
Might more of His salvation know
And seek more earnestly His face.

'Twas He who taught me thus to pray,
And He, I trust, has answered prayer;
But it has been in such a way
As almost drove me to despair.

I hoped that in some favoured hour
At once He'd answer my request,
And by His love's constraining power,
Subdue my sins, and give me rest.

Instead of this, He made me feel
The hidden evils of my heart,
And let the angry powers of hell
Assault my soul in every part.

That poignant poem belongs to the same experience as this Psalm. In the press of the foe the soul discovers itself weak and inadequate. The hour of gloom which borders on despair will not be in vain if it brings to the soul a knowledge of how vulnerable it is, how it needs other defences, and must have God.

3. The soul, disenchanted and disillusioned, discovers a new urgency and reality in prayer. 'Oh send out thy light and thy truth; let them lead me. . . . O deliver me!' Religion has been called a prayer for life. It is when life is failing us that we discover the reality of prayer. We have prayed quietly and soberly for years; we have said prayers; then in some hour of our need, we cry out to God, and we pray. We discover the great realities when we cannot live without them. It is in our time of failure and disillusion that we pray mightily. With the enemy before us undisguised, with self revealed in all its defencelessness, in the hour of terror and despair we pray. When we are near to perishing we cry to the Saviour, 'Save, Lord!' and prayer has a reality it has never had before. May it not be worth while to pass through the dark night if we can discover prayer?

But prayer is not discovered in all its reality till in answer to it light and truth are given to guide the soul to the altar of God. It is not prayer that delivers the soul, but the living God. The soul is saved when it is lifted and carried by the God who has become real with a new reality to the soul. This is the last and most wonderful discovery—God—the God who gives joy to the soul. This is always God's answer to the cry for deliverance. He leads the soul to His altar—to Himself. The enemies are still there; the way still lies through a country invested by foes; but the soul has awakened to an altogether new and amazing experience; its way is henceforth set to music. Blessed will be every revelation of the enemy, every humiliation of the soul, all the wrestling of the soul in prayer, if it can find the Reality at last—God, its Joy.

We kneel—how weak! We rise—how full of power!
Why, therefore, should we do ourselves this wrong,
Or others—that we are not always strong,
That we are ever overborne with care,
That we should ever weak or heartless be,
Anxious or troubled, when with us is prayer,
And joy and strength and courage are with Thee? [1]

Why?

Ps. xliii. 5.—'Why art thou cast down, O my soul?' and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God.'

THESE words occur three times at short intervals in this Psalm and in the preceding one. They appear there twice, and here once. Quite obviously the division into two Psalms is a mistake, for the whole constitutes one composition. The first part of each of the sections into which the one original Psalm is divided by the repetition of this refrain is a monotone of complaint. The Psalmist is in circumstances of depression and disappointment. But when he struggles up, as it were, to the height of questioning himself what all this trouble of soul and depression mean, and when he has got the length of questioning his mood instead of passively yielding to it, then he goes further and encourages himself—'Hope thou in God.'

But again the wave of trouble rolls in, and sweeps away the flimsy barrier that he had put up. The weary round is gone all over again—the complaint and the enumeration of the sad things that befall him, and the expressions of his despondency. Then once more he lifts his head above water, and catches a glimpse of the light. Again he asks, 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul?' But once more the climbing sorrow gets the better of him, and he wails his complaint all over again, and then, for the third time, he rises above it, and rebuilds his wall against the flood, and this time the barrier stands, and the flood is finally dammed back.

[1] Archbishop Trench.

¶ In the Cathedral of St. Mark's, Venice, there is a mosaic that represents Christ in Gethsemane. You remember that, like the Psalmist, He prayed three times there, and twice came back, not having received His desire, but the third time He did receive it. The devout artist has presented Him thus: the first time prone on the ground, and the sky all black; the second time raised a little, and a strip of blue in one corner; and the third time, kneeling erect, and a beam from heaven, brighter than the radiance of the Paschal moon, striking down upon Him, and the strengthening Angel standing beside Him. That was the experience of the Lord, and it may be the experience of the servant. Once I ask, twice I ask, and I do not receive an answer. 'For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.'

Thrice the Psalmist climbed, like some poor insect trying to get up a blade of grass. Twice he climbed and twice fell, but the third time he reached the top and kept there. He makes one great leap, as it were, across the black flood that has been ringing him round, and says to his soul: 'Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.'

The one medicine for a disquieted, cast-down soul is hope in God. People say a great deal about the buoyant energy of hope bearing a man up over his troubles. Yes, so it does in some measure, but there is only one case in which there is a real bearing up over the troubles, and that is where the hope is in God. 'Hope thou—' Yes; but what am I to hope in? That things will be better to-morrow? Perhaps. That I shall get over the trouble and be stronger for it? Possibly. That 'the light affliction' is 'but for a moment'? Well; some of them are not 'but for a moment.' 'Hope thou in God!'—that is the secret. It is only the sunrise that scatters the mists; and it is only a hope 'in God' that is sure to rise victorious over all conceivable troubles, and at last to turn despondency and disquiet into brightness and calmness. That is the one rainbow that lies above the fiercest hell of falling waters, foaming tortured in the

cataract. The waters foam themselves away, 'the things that are seen are temporal,' but the rainbow is always there, eternal. 'Hope in God,' and disquiet, and all the other ghosts of the night, vanish as at cockcrow.[1]

Our Idols.

Ps. xliv. 20, 21.—'If we have forsaken the name of our God or stretched out our hands to a strange God; shall not God search this out? for he knoweth the secrets of the heart.'

THE text suggests three things: first, the sin of forgetting God and holding up our hands to some strange god; second, the certainty of the discovery of the wrong-doing and its punishment; third, the ground of this certainty—He with whom we have to reckon discerns the thoughts and intentions of men.

1. The Psalmist contemplates sin under two aspects—as a turning away from the true God and a turning to some false god. They are not two sins but one; the same sin viewed in its positive and its negative aspect. The two sins are one, because no man can be without a god. If he have not the true God to bless and sustain him, he will have some false deity to delude and betray him. The Bible is one continuous protest against the sin of idolatry. Not until the Jewish nation fell beneath the crushing blow of the Exile was it cured for ever of the fascinations of idol worship. Therefore all Scripture rings with denunciations of this sin.

But what interest have these denunciations for us? To talk in this twentieth century of the sin of worshipping false gods seems very much like beating the air. Let us not be so sure of that. The temptation to idolatry is no mere archaism. Even in these days it is not so inconceivable a sin as some people imagine. Human nature is not different from what it ever was. Now, how was it that the Israelites of old were so ready to fall into the sin of idolatry? There must have been something in the worship of Moloch or Baal, or the Golden Calf that exercised a deadly fascination over their minds. What was it?

These idols were the deification of man's worst impulses; they were the patrons of his basest desires; they consecrated, under the sanction of religion, his deadliest passions. The religion of Israel enjoined a life of purity and of more self-control. Therefore the Israelites of old were under a constant temptation to emancipate themselves from their galling restraints by imitating idolatrous rites which opened the door to many sins. In worshipping the Golden Calf they became votaries of Mammon; covetousness became to them not merely an attractive pursuit but a hallowed ambition. The worship of Moloch threw a halo of sanctity around the perpetration of cruelty. The rites of Baal-Peor proved attractive because they gave a licence to the gratification of unholy desire. And these sins still hold sway over human nature, so that nowadays, although we do not make unto ourselves graven images, we nevertheless break the Second Commandment, as surely as did our ancestors, when we deify the instincts of our lower nature, and say to gold, or cruelty, or impurity, 'Be thou my life's guiding-star'; or when we put success in life or any other thing before God, as our chief good.

A man's worship of these idols is often very secret. They may be what Francis Bacon would have called 'idols of the cave,' withdrawn from the gaze of the outer world, and hidden deep in a man's own heart. They may almost be hidden from the man himself, so that he is scarcely conscious of their existence. But they are there nevertheless, and there is One above who takes note of them.

¶ Recently a singular case was adjudicated upon by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. A suit was brought by an Indian Rajah, as custodian of some family idols, to recover possession of a village alleged to have been dedicated to the service of idols. How strange such a subject seems to Englishmen! Idols! A village dedicated to the service of idols! How remote, absurd, superstitious the whole thing seems in the light of European civilization!

[1] A. MacLaren.

And yet dare we cast a stone? Have we no personal idols, family idols, national idols? Not merely a village dedicated to idols, but vast cities offering costly sacrifices to Bacchus, to Moloch, to Mammon, to gods many? How many things come between us and God, robbing Him of our love, worship and obedience![1]

2. God will search out these idols, these strange gods, to which we lift up our hands and render the love and service we owe to God Himself. In the eighth chapter of Ezekiel there is a very remarkable vision bearing upon this subject. The Prophet is brought into the Temple at Jerusalem, and on entering he sees portrayed upon the walls every form of creeping thing, abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel. And there are the seventy elders of the community, each man holding a censer in his hand, with which he burns incense to these abominations. All this is meant to typify the secret sins to which the people are addicted. And as the odour of the cloud of incense ascends, a voice calls to the Prophet: 'Son of man, hast thou seen what the elders of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in his chambers of imagery? for they say, The Lord seeth us not; the Lord hath forsaken the earth.' Our text teaches that God does see, that He is searching our idols out, dragging them to the light of day, and showing us what nothingness they are; how unable to bless, how impotent to save. We thought, perhaps, that our idol-service was so hidden that no one could know of it. We flattered ourselves it would escape even God's eyes. But it has not escaped them, and in due time He makes it plain that it has not.

Thus, one man is greedy of honour, of the world's reputation, to be highly spoken of and highly esteemed among men. If he could obtain this honour, he has cared little for the honour which proceedeth of God, has, indeed, been well contented to go without this. Reputation has been his idol, his strange god, to which he has burnt his incense and lifted up his hands. But God has seen and searched it out; and this man, greedy of honour, living upon the world's praise, is brought by some fault or folly to open discredit and dishonour. His idol has been searched out, and, perhaps before half his earthly course is done, lies in shattered fragments at his feet.

3. How is God able so exactly to find out that wherein we have sinned the most, and to plague us in and through the same? not merely to burn our idols with fire and grind them to powder, but to strew this bitter powder on the very waters which we must drink? The Psalmist tells us how: 'For he knoweth the very secrets of the heart.' There is no darkness or shadow of death where the workers of iniquity can hide themselves, because He is the same God who took Ezekiel of old, and showed him the secret idolatries of Jerusalem. Our chambers of imagery, He beholds them too; and the darkness in which the worship of our idols may be conducted there is light and not darkness to Him. And those chambers of imagery He will break down, unless we are beforehand with Him, unless we break them down ourselves, and throw down with our own hands, before the day of His visitation has arrived, the idols which provoke Him to jealousy.

Dear God and Father of us all
Forgive our faith in cruel lies,
Forgive the blindness that denies,
Forgive Thy creature, when he takes
For the all-perfect love Thou art
Some grim creation of his heart.
Cast down our idols; overturn
Our bloody altars: let us see
Thyself in Thy humanity.

[1] W. L. Watkinson, *The Gates of Dawn*, 325.

The Highest Ideal.

Ps. xlv. 1.—'I speak of the things which I have made touching the king.'

The 45th Psalm celebrates, in a high and noble strain, the nuptials of an Israelite king. It is Messianic, in so far as it portrays an *ideal*. The king, whoever he was, whom the poet addresses is invested by him with ideal attri-

butes: he is the impersonation of high virtues and perfections; he is fairer than the children of men, graciousness is shed over his lips, therefore he is blessed of God for ever; he is to carry on a crusade on behalf of the faithful, the humble, and the righteous; He loves righteousness and hates wickedness, and therefore extraordinary blessings and happiness are showered upon him. The Psalm thus falls into line with other Psalms and prophecies in which similar thoughts are expressed and similar ideals projected—the 2nd and the 72nd Psalms, for instance, and the 110th. These Psalms express promises or hopes not fulfilled by any actual monarch of Israel; they portray the king, not simply as what he was, but as what he should or might be; in other words, they portray an *ideal*.

Note three things then—(1) the Psalmist chooses the highest ideal; (2) he fills his soul with it; and (3) he pours forth his heart's rapture by his lips.

1. Let us choose the highest ideal for our life. When we set forth each morning to weave the history of another day, when we take in hand our daily work, when we bethink us of life, and time, and opportunity, and the tasks our hands undertake, what do we say to ourselves concerning them? What meaning do we assign to them? By what motive is our heart impelled? Let us remember that the value of our work depends entirely upon the choice of our ideal. To live our life without an aim is to fling it away. There are some who look with longing upon the dream of possessing such a portion of this world's goods as would enable them to spend the rest of their existence on earth without a purpose and without an aim except that of self-indulgence. They are charmed with the fancy which pictures existence as a pleasant, unbroken dream on a fairy couch. They would eat the lotus, and sing in dreamy cadence—

> Most weary is the sea, weary the oar,
> Weary the wandering fields of barren foam,
> We will no longer roam.

If the folly of such a fancy has ever crossed our mind, let us give it no quarter. The man of pleasure is dead while he lives. Let us choose a definite ideal in life, let us choose an ideal worthy of our human estate.

The perfect ideal for the lives of all men is found in Christ. His kingship over human character is twofold. He presents the sovereign ideal for character, and He makes the realization of that ideal possible. Though we may be bruised and broken, we may yet rise in the power of Christ, and follow the vision of His glory until we find it fulfilled in our own life. Jesus is the ladder that reaches to Heaven, and His is also the Divine hand which enables us to climb from rung to rung. The greatest normal heroes of history have been Christ's men.

¶ Watts was great in his idealism. On the sundial in his garden was inscribed the motto of his life—'The Utmost for the Highest.' That was always his watchword, and his life was worthy its nobility. It was characteristic of him that the daisy was his favourite flower, because 'though a humble thing it looks up.' It was this persistent idealism that made Watts the man he was. It pervaded all his work. It kept him ever humble, hopeful, sane in thought, wholesome in outlook, catholic in sympathy. It was this that gave him his courageous faith in humanity. He made his appeal as an artist deliberately to the democracy, even though he knew that the democracy as a whole cares as much for Art as it does for the binomial theorem. But he believed in the power of Art to educate and elevate the people, and he knew that the public must be the final arbiter. He was fully aware that this would not mean an immediate recognition and popularity, but he was content to labour and to wait. 'The character of a nation,' he said, 'is more important than its government.' By keeping his life pure, his aim high, his work as noble and perfect as he could make it, Watts has made his own contribution to the character of the nation. And this faithful fulfilment of his own ideal—'the Utmost for the Highest'—is not the least of his claims to fame and gratitude.[1]

[1] W. A. Mursell.

2. Having chosen our ideal, let us fill our heart to the brim with it. Having what the Psalmist calls 'goodly matter' to deal with, let us make our heart 'well up' with it, let us fill the fountains to the brim. This matter of the King has so taken the heart of the Psalmist that it has captured all its springs and filled all its vessels. One translation of the passage suggested by Delitzsch is, 'My heart "overflows" with goodly matter.' A great ideal may be held slackly and ineffectively. Some have handled such an ideal so slackly that it has fallen out of their hands and disappeared, leaving their last state worse than the first. If we have discovered the secret of angelic visitations, let us allow no vacant chambers for the intrusion of counter-working demons. A Divine ideal should be entertained divinely, with all the resources at our command.

There is but one method of excluding evil from the heart: we must fill the heart to the brim with good. We cannot conquer evil by merely negative exertions, by simple resistance to habits of evil. When we cut off a head of the many-headed dragon, another grows in its place. Evil must be displaced by the development of good. The dwelling of the spirit must be filled so full with precious things that there shall be no room for trash. If an empty corner is left, the devil will deposit a load of trash there, whether we will or not. If we keep a chamber vacant of celestial spirits, spirits of evil will find it out and occupy it. The devil is a haunter of empty spaces. Let us keep him out by filling our heart to the brim with the presence of the King.

¶ Simply to be concerned with rejecting evil will not make us safe. This is illustrated by Jesus in a short parable which is pre-eminent among the parables for vivid exhortation and warning. The unclean spirit returns to the heart of man from which he had been driven, and finds nothing there, no evil at all, less indeed than when he was there before, but equally no good. With seven other spirits more evil than himself he returns into the man's heart, whose last state is worse than his first. This is horribly exact psychology. Evil suggestions from environment will inevitably enter the mind of man; they may be ejected at first, but the invasion will be overwhelming unless he has countered them with suggestions which are positively good and inspired by the Holy Spirit. He must engage the energies of his instincts, the interest of his mind, the will and desire of his heart, with that which is positively good. It all sounds so simple, and it is so very hard. It means opening the heart without reserve to the presence of Christ; where there is any reserve, any corner into which we do not admit Him, evil suggestions will find a home and start their activities. To open the heart wholly to Christ will mean sacrifice, self-denial, isolation, poverty, loss of friends—any of these. It will also mean joy, power such as we have never known, and peace.[1]

3. Having chosen our ideal, and having brimmed the heart with it, let us flush the life to the lips with it. The royal theme of the Psalmist passed from the overflowing of the heart to the outpouring of the lips. My tongue, he said, is the pen of a ready writer. It was difficult to prevent the Divine theme which overflowed his heart from flowing out into complete expression. If he put his pen to paper, straightway it began to write in fluent lines the glories of the King. If he opened his mouth to speak, his tongue immediately caught the message of his overflowing heart, and grew eloquent with the exalted theme. The theme had become the very life of him, and could not be held back from expression except by blocking up the avenues of life. Let us entertain a wholesome fear of restraining the expression of our holy ideals in our daily life. If, from timidity or any other cause, we suppress the natural expression of the Divine theme that has filled our heart, we shall do great violence to it and to our own nature. When a young Christian is surrounded by worldly scorners, he is sorely tempted to hide and check some of the natural and spontaneous workings of religious faith.

[1] T. W. Pym, *Psychology and the Christian Life*, 115.

But there is nothing in the workings of Christian faith that we need hide or be ashamed of. Let the heart's ideal flush the life to the very lips. Let it have free course to express itself in word and look and action. Let the world say or do what it will, a great benediction shall be ours.

¶ Miss Havergal tells us of her experience in the girls' school at Dusseldorf. She went there soon after she had become a Christian and had confessed Christ. Her heart was very warm with love for her Saviour and she was eager to speak for Him. To her amazement, however, she soon learned that among the hundred girls in the school she was the only Christian. Her first thought was one of dismay—she could not confess Christ in that great company of worldly, unChristian companions. Her gentle, sensitive heart shrank from a duty so hard. Her second thought, however, was that she could not refrain from confessing Christ. She was the only one Christ had there and she must be faithful. 'This was very bracing,' she writes. 'I felt I must try to walk worthy of my calling for Christ's sake. It brought a new and strong desire to bear witness for my Master. It made me more watchful and earnest than ever before, for I knew that any slip in word or deed would bring discredit on my Master.' She realized that she had a mission in that school, that she was Christ's witness there, His only witness, and that she dare not fail.[1]

[1] J. T. Miller, *The Glory of the Commonplace*, 74.

The Beauty of the Messiah.

Psalm xlv. 2.—'Thou art fairer than the children of men.'

This Psalm is usually looked upon as Messianic. On that understanding it is read in the Church on Christmas Day. There are difficulties, chiefly exegetical; but even so rigidly scientific an exegete as Dr. Driver says that 'the Psalm may still be read with perfect propriety in our Church on Christmas Day, as setting forth a great ideal of kingly virtues and kingly rule, which Christ realized in the transfigured and spiritualized realm of David in which He assumed the throne.'[1]

It is affirmed, then, that Christ is more beautiful, more perfect than the children of men. In what essential features of humanity is Christ fairer or more beautiful than the children of men?

1. With reference to physical beauty, we may say, in passing, that we have no revelation on the subject of the outward form which Jesus presented to the world. In an age when the art of copying the human form had attained a supreme perfection—for we have to-day the accurate lineaments of princes, orators, and teachers who flourished before the Christian era—there was a reason why the world should never possess in the galleries of art the face and form of Him who was conceived by the Holy Ghost. Yet we sympathize with the curiosity that would seek to recover the facial impression of 'the temple of His body,' and with the genius which reverently consecrates its fancy and devotes its pencil to the attempt of conceiving and rendering a face illumined by the majesty of the Son of God. We can hardly doubt that the body of Jesus was beautiful, though its comeliness may have been marred by labour and sorrow, until the charms that win a vulgar admiration had vanished.

¶ In the vaults of a New York bank, within hearing of the rush and roar of Fifth Avenue, rests an ancient Christian chalice or communion cup of heavy chiselled silver. Crushed and corroded as it is, it is a magnificent example of Christian art; indeed, it would be difficult to name another worthy of comparison with it. For centuries it was a chief treasure of the Church of Antioch in Syria, mother of all the Gentile churches of the world. For many more centuries it lay buried beneath the ruins of the ancient city, forgotten and seemingly lost for ever. Accidentally discovered in 1910 by some Arabs while digging, it has now been brought to the very heart of our twentieth-century civilization, there to

[1] *Studies in the Psalms*, 94.

focus upon itself the interest of the Christian world and to become the subject of long controversy.

The chalice consists of two parts, an inner cup and an outer goblet-shaped 'shell' designed as a holder for the cup. Among the decorations of the holder are twelve seated figures, two of which represent Christ.

Dr. G. A. Eisen, after nine years' study of the chalice, has announced his conclusions. He is of the opinion that the holder was made before A.D. 100 by an artist who had seen Christ and the Apostles; that the two representations of Christ are actual portraits of Him, and the other ten portraits of as many Christian leaders; that the inner cup for which this magnificent holder was made is the very cup used by Christ at the Last Supper, at which He instituted the sacrament of the Eucharist.

An announcement so sensational will not easily find favour with sensible people. That the Quest of the Holy Grail, for hundreds of years the theme of poetry and romance, should at last, and in our prosaic and sceptical age, be crowned with success; that, more than eighteen centuries after the death of the last person who had seen Christ in the flesh, we of the sixtieth generation should be able to form some idea of His personal appearance—no fairy tale could be more incredible! ... .

But no one who has seen the chalice will dismiss it without a second thought. The chalice will strike deep into one's mind and compel one to think of it more than twice. Its 'point,' so to speak, lies in the twelve seeming portraits. They are so vivid, so full of life and character, that they give the impression of being actual portraits of real people, and the longer one looks the deeper the impression becomes. . . .

The two figures of Christ are of course the most interesting, and they are also the most extraordinary. Of all representations of Christ ever made, surely these must be farthest from any attempt at flattery. Although they are both seated, He seems to be short of stature. In both the head is of the same very peculiar shape; it is disproportionately large, almost circular around the base, like a dish, and the crown is high and dome-shaped. In the younger figure the cheeks are heavy, the mouth wide and the lips very thin; the chin is broad and flat. In the older figure the features are nearly but not quite the same. Most impressive and yet indescribable is the expression. Pictures give no satisfactory idea of the subtle, haunting beauty of these 'homely' faces. My first feeling upon seeing them was one of disappointment, but the longer I looked the more profoundly did they affect me, and they literally haunted me for days.

I have asked three persons, all trained students of the history of art, to describe the impression they received, but they seemed unable or unwilling to go into detail. One, who before he saw the chalice had been quite sure it could not be earlier than the fourth century, said: 'While I was looking at them I found it impossible to doubt that they were actual portraits of Christ; I had to get away from them before I could make the doubts come back again.' Another: 'I could not see them very well, because whenever I looked at them the tears blinded my eyes.' Another: 'There is something about them which sinks into the depths of one's soul, something divine.' And I cannot do any better. I seemed to see in them infinite love and infinite sadness, but there was something more which I could not put into words. It was as though I were getting through my eyes something of the impression which Christ's character and teaching make upon me when I read the Gospels. I have seen many hundred, probably many thousand, portrayals of Christ, among them those of the greatest artists, but I never before saw one that seemed so satisfying.[1]

2. But in respect of that which is the source of beauty—perfect growth from the inner man to the outward, the life as complete in expression as in conception—Jesus stands alone. The beauty of a perfect growth from the thought to the act belongs to Him and to Him only. It is this feature that gives Him an eminence

[1] W. R. Newbold.

so lofty, that not only does no one make the slightest pretension to share it with Him, but it has never occurred to public opinion even to suggest the possibility of a rival. Herein is the secret of that strange ascendancy which He gains even over those who have no sympathy with Him. Personal enemies He has none: no civilized man reviles Him. Those who dispute His claims adore His character.

¶ That illustrious sceptic of modern times, John Stuart Mill, may speak for the rest. 'Christ,' he says, 'was a morally perfect being. Whatever may be taken away from us by rational criticism, Christ is still left a unique figure, not more unlike all His precursors than all His followers, even those who had the direct benefit of His personal teaching. About the life and sayings of Jesus there is a stamp of personal originality combined with profundity of insight which must place the Prophet of Nazareth, even in the estimation of those who have no belief in His inspiration, in the very first rank of the men of sublime genius.'

3. This leads us to consider the dominant spirit of Christ's life. It was not merely the love of truth, of purity, of duty, and of work; it was love for mankind. It was the labour of His life to seek out and to recover the lost mind of man; to bring back its dignity, its honour, and its beauty by restoring its union with God. This Psalm invokes Him in splendid imagery as a military personage, preparing an expedition for universal conquest: but His enemies were not men, and His weapons were not carnal. His mighty sword was truth; His shield meekness; His girdle righteousness; His adversary was the devil. We need not define or defend the personality of the devil. It is enough for us to know that Jesus did not contend with imaginary demons, the creatures of a heated temperament, but with veritable spirits of evil.

What we have to consider to-day is the condition into which the world has been brought: the palpable evils which are as prevalent as in the time of Christ's personal intercourse with men. The seeming of truth instead of truth itself; the tyranny of ambition, assuming the form of the protection of right; the hollow and dissimulating kindness which rules the courtesy of society; the colossal frauds which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers; the villainous hypocrisy that hides itself in the vestments of the temple; the drunkenness that blasphemes and shames the image of God; the idolatry that carries the most stupendous of all lies in its right hand—these are the enemies which Christ challenged to mortal combat, and not men who are their victims. The sword which He drew when He went forth to meet them is in His grasp still, and will never be laid aside until His enemies be made His footstool.

Christ is everywhere; filled with ideas of beauty, and with powers of reconstruction; spreading Himself like the morning over the dark places of the world to make all things new; to make the earth reflect His own fairness. His throne must prosper, because the sceptre of His Kingdom is a right sceptre. He calls us to be witnesses of the fact that He finds tumult and He leaves peace; that He finds guilt and shame, and leaves purity and honour; that He finds loss and sorrow, and leaves the wealth and the joy of His own communion. And having beautified our spirits and fellowships and homes, He sends us forth to follow the steps of His laborious and all-conquering love, until the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ.

The Winsomeness of Jesus.

Ps. xlv. 2.—'Grace is poured into thy lips.'

If we take these words in reference to our Lord, we remember that on the occasion of His delivering His first sermon in Nazareth, where He had been brought up, 'all wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.' It was in His speech that men felt His spell most powerfully, but it radiated from His whole life. From the moment when He was baptized on to the last agony on Calvary—at the marriage feast—

at the table of Zacchæus—out in the meadows where the lilies were—everywhere, in every different circumstance, men felt not only the holiness of Jesus; they were arrested also by His winsomeness. It was indeed this very winsomeness that was a stumbling-block to godly Jews. It was so different from all that they had read of in the men whom God had sent to be His messengers. Had Christ been stern, and lived a rugged life, and dwelt apart in fellowship with heaven, they would have been swifter to recognize His claims. It was in such guise the ancient prophets lived. It was in such guise that John the Baptist lived. He was a rugged man of fiery speech, and he fared coarsely, and loved to be alone. And then came Jesus, moving with delight among the homes and haunts of common people, and His very winsomeness was a perpetual riddle to the Jews. They could not understand His childlike interest in every flower that made the meadow beautiful. They could not understand His love for children nor His quiet happiness in common life. Reverencing the old prophetic character as that of the true messenger from God, they were baffled by the winsomeness of Jesus.

1. One of the commonest features of the winsome character is a certain delightful and engaging diffidence. It is extremely rare to discover charm in anybody who seems a stranger to the grace of modesty. And though of course it is not suggested that Christ was such a stranger, yet the fact remains that there never lived a man who made such amazing and stupendous claims. 'I am the way, the truth, and the life: No man cometh unto the Father but by me.' Was there ever heard from human lips such amazing and unbounded self-assertion? And the wonderful thing is that, with a note like that ringing like a trumpet through the ministry, men should still have felt that Christ was winsome. The fact is that unless Christ had lived men would have called His character impossible. So to assert, yet all the while to charm, is almost beyond credence psychologically. And it is just this glorious self-assertion sounding through the ministry of Christ that makes His winsomeness to thinking men such a baffling and amazing thing.

2. Again, the wonder of Christ's winsomeness is deepened when we remember His loyalty to truth. Christ did not say, 'I speak the truth'; He said, 'I *am* the truth.' Now it is one of the sad things about the winsome character that it is not the most truthful character. There is often more of truth in the blunt man than there is in the charming and attractive man. The former takes a sturdy pride in telling out exactly what he thinks; the latter, by his very temperament, is in peril of prophesying smooth things. When truth is unpleasant, the winsome character is continually under temptation to conceal it. There may still be a compliment upon the lip, although there is a curse within the heart. And that is why men are generally readier to trust one who is bold and blunt and rugged than one whose distinguishing attribute is charm. They have a lurking conviction that the winsome man, for all his winsomeness, is not quite sincere. They question if he is really genuine, when in every society he is so delightful. And this is the wonder of Christ's winsomeness, *not* that men felt it and acknowledged it, but that they felt it in One who stirred them to the deeps by His passionate loyalty to truth. 'I am the truth,' said Jesus Christ; and He lived that out to the last syllable. Not by a hairbreadth did He ever swerve from all that had been given Him from heaven. And the strange thing is that, with such sublime fidelity to Himself and His brother and His God, He should yet have been so infinitely winsome. 'We beheld his glory,' says the Apostle John, 'and it was full of grace and truth.' That was the wonder of it in apostolic eyes, and that has been the wonder of the ages. There are men who are splendidly truthful and not gracious. There are men who are finely gracious and not truthful. This was the wonder of the Son of God, that He was full of grace *and* truth.

3. The wonder of that winsomeness is deepened also by the experiences of Christ's life on earth. He was a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and men hid as it were their faces from Him. Had He always lived among the hills at Nazareth we might more easily have understood His charm: Dreaming His dreams there, where the world was beautiful, we might have expected a character of beauty. But Christ deliberately left that quietude, and flung Himself into the battle of humanity, and it is when we think how awful was that battle that we marvel to find Him winsome still. If ever there was a life to make one stern, it was the life that Jesus had to live. It was so hard, so misinterpreted, so ringed about with diabolic malice. Yet spite of every lip that taunted Him, and every heart that hungered for His tripping, Christ never lost, whether in word or deed, the winsomeness that so attracted men. To be suspected as Jesus was suspected is not the common road to charm of character. It is not often that life blossoms out in an atmosphere of suspicion and of treachery. Yet every day Christ rose *there* were the Pharisees, and *there* was Judas with his eyes of malice, and men said, 'He is mad; He hath a devil'—and Jesus through it all was winsome still. Still had He eyes for the lilies of the field. Still was He happy in the home at Bethany. Still was He in love with little children, and happy-hearted and pitiful and courteous. It is this contrast between the outward lot and the infinite and inward grace of the Redeemer that makes so wonderful to thinking men the winsomeness of Christ.[1]

[1] G. H. Morrison, *The Afterglow of God*, 252ff.

CHARM.

Ps. xlv. 2.—'Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips.'
Cant. v. 16.—'His mouth is most sweet: yea he is altogether lovely.'
II. Sam. i. 23.—'Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives.'

THE quality of charm is the most potent of the characteristics of humanity and the least definable. It is that which is most swiftly perceived and most impossible to describe. It is neither the direct result of learning or goodness or accomplishments, nor any specific gift or grace, and still it includes the essential element in all these.

It is not characteristic of human beings only. Mr. A. C. Benson finds it in scenery. He finds it in 'the simplest and quietest place imaginable, with a simple and remote life hardly aware of itself, flowing tranquilly through it; yet this little village, by some felicity of grouping and gathering, has the rare and incomparable gift of charm. I cannot analyse it, I cannot explain it, yet at all times and in all lights, whether its orchards are full of bloom and scent, and the cuckoo flutes from the holt down the soft breeze, or in the bare and leafless winter, when the pale sunset glows beyond the wold among the rifted cloudbanks, it has the wonderful appeal of beauty, a quality which cannot be schemed for or designed, but which a very little mishandling can sweep away.'[1]

I.

1. What is it? 'In Nature,' to quote Mr. Benson again, 'it seems to arise partly out of a subtle orderliness and a simple appropriateness, and partly from a blending of delicate and pathetic elements in a certain unascertained proportion. It seems to touch unknown memories into life, and to give a hint of the working of some half-whimsical, half-tenderly concerned spirit, brooding over its work, adding a touch of form here and a dash of colour

[1] A. C. Benson, *Escape*, 88.

there, and pleased to see, when all is done, that it is good.'[1]

Mrs. Oliphant calls it 'that inexplicable fascination which is more than beauty.' Mr. Benson says it is a subdivision of beauty. 'There are many things in Nature and in art, from the Matterhorn to "Samson Agonistes," that have no charm, but that appeal to a different range of emotions, the sublime, the majestic, the awe-inspiring, things in the presence of which we are hardly at ease; but charm is essentially a comfortable quality, something that one gathers to one's heart, and if there is a mystery about it, as there is about all beautiful things, it is not a mystery of which one would be afraid to know the secret. Charm is the quality which makes one desire to linger upon one's pilgrimage, that cries to the soul to halt, to rest, to be content. It is intimate, reassuring, and appealing; and the shadow of it is the gentle pathos, which is in itself half a luxury of sadness, in the thoughts that sweet things must have an end.' As Herrick wrote to the daffodils:

Stay, stay
Until the hasting day
Has run
But to the evensong:
And, having prayed together, we
Will go with you along.

We have short time to stay, as you,
We have as short a spring;
As quick a growth to meet decay
As you, or anything.[2]

2. Charm is attributed to women more often than to men. At a Church Congress held in Liverpool, some years ago, Miss Weight addressed a meeting for girls. She spoke about 'the gift of attractiveness which at its highest is charm.' 'There are different kinds of attractiveness,' she said, 'and the first belongs to us because we are ourselves. You are attractive simply because you are a woman. Have you ever noticed how great an attraction a class held by a lady is? Take, for instance, a Bible class, a carving class, a class for brasswork, or even a company of the Lads' Brigade. Have you ever noticed how successful the teaching has been carried on by a woman? All the chivalry, all the courtesy, and the gentlemanliness of the boys comes out at once when a woman is the teacher. I have often thought that, very likely, one of the great secrets of the success of the Salvation Army lies in the fact that they employ so many devoted, attractive women workers.'

Here are four examples of charming women.

(1) Santa Teresa.—Says Dr. Alexander Whyte, 'There is nothing more delightful in all her delightful Autobiography, and in the fine "censures" that have been preserved concerning it, than to read of the great and learned theologians, the responsible church leaders, and even the secret inquisitors who came under the charm of her character and the spell of her pen.'[1]

(2) Alice le Strange (Mrs. Laurence Oliphant).—'It very rarely happens that friends, acquaintances, and lookers-on are all of one opinion concerning any individual; but I have never heard of any diversity of view in respect to Alice le Strange. I have heard her spoken of in all kinds of quarters, and from the most fastidious critics in London down to the humble and homely German colonists in Haifa, there has never been but one voice. She was so full of "charm," that inexplicable fascination which is more than beauty, that it was possible her actual gifts might have been overlooked in the pleasure of encountering herself, the combination of them all; so that the beauty, the wit, the sweet vivacity, the pure and brilliant intelligence, became so many delightful discoveries after the first and greatest, of finding one's self face to face with a being so gracious and delightful.'[2]

(3) Zoe Thomson (wife of Archbishop Thomson).—Zoe's beauty was of a kind that could not be overlooked. If she went into a shop, the undergraduates would hang about

[1] A. C. Benson, *Escape*, 89.
[2] Ibid, 105

[1] A. Whyte, *Santa Teresa*, 11.
[2] Mrs. Oliphant, *Laurence Oliphant*, 237.

the door to get a glimpse of her as she came out. And she had what Sir Walter Raleigh calls in one of his poems, 'That sweet, attractive kind of grace' which is hard to define, since it is neither beauty nor intelligence, nor goodness, nor manner, nor manners, though generally, as in her case, akin to these—a quality to which we give the name of charm.[1]

(4) Laura Lyttelton. — There are many records of her charm. Mrs. Humphry Ward's is worth quoting: 'Laura Lyttelton was not only youth and delight—she was also embodied love. I have watched her in a crowded room where everybody wanted her, quietly seek out the neglected person there, the stranger, the shy secretary or governess, and make them happy—bring them in—with an art that few noticed, because in her it was nature. When she died, she left an enduring mark in the minds of many who have since governed or guided England; but she was mourned also by scores of humble folk, and by disagreeable folk whom only she befriended.' Again: 'Throughout social and literary history there have been few apparitions like hers, which touch with peculiar force, in the hearts of men and women, the old, deep, human notes which "make us men." Youth, beauty, charm, death —they are the great themes with which all art, plastic or literary, tries to conjure. It is given to very few to handle them simply, yet sufficiently; with power, yet without sentimentality. Breathed into Laura's short life, they affected those who knew her like the finest things in poetry.'[2]

3. But charm has been attributed to men. Here are five examples picked up in recent reading in biography.

(1) R. L. Stevenson.—'There was this about him, that he was the only man I have ever known who possessed charm in a high degree, whose character did not suffer from the possession. The gift comes naturally to women, and they are at their best in its exercise. But a man requires to be of a very sound fibre before he can be entirely himself and keep his heart single, if he carries about with him a talisman to obtain from all men and all women the object of his heart's desire. Both gifts Stevenson possessed, not only the magic but also the strength of character to which it was safely intrusted.'[1]

(2) General Gordon.—This is a quotation from *The Times:* it was written by Mr. Power, the *Times* correspondent in Khartoum. 'Gordon is a most lovable character—quiet, mild, gentle and strong; he is so humble, too. The way he pats you on the shoulder when he says, "Look here, dear fellow, now what do you advise?" would make you love him. When he goes out-of-doors, there are always crowds of Arab men and women at the gate to kiss his feet, and twice to-day the furious women, wishing to lift his feet to kiss them, threw him over. Numbers of women flock here every day to ask him to touch their children, to cure them; they call him the "father and the Saviour of the Soudan."'[2]

(3) Alfred Lyttelton.—It is rare, indeed, for the pages of the Press to beat with the pulse of intimate passion, such as was to be felt in the records that tried to tell why Alfred Lyttelton was so wonderfully beloved. Men could not find words to express their emotion: they were not ashamed to show how deeply they were stirred. They wrote what would seem to outsiders words of exaggeration: and yet, even the outsider as he read them knew that the words were below the mark of what was really meant. Alfred Lyttelton had a most singular charm, a sympathetic magic. There was something distinctive in the tone of the voice, in the look of the eyes. He was unforgettable. He won hearts straight away. He had, as Lord Curzon said in 'The Times,' an endearing manner which was in itself a caress. And, then, his athletic achievements had about them the glamour and the glory of some supreme perfection. 'His cricket is like champagne,' said W. G. Grace, in a fit of un-

[1] E. C. Richards, *Zoe Thomson*, 35.
[2] Mrs. Humphry Ward, *A Writer's Recollections*, 204, 205.

[1] Graham Balfour, *The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ii. 185.
[2] R. E. Speer, *Some Great Leaders in the World Movement*, 288.

wonted poetic enthusiasm. Everything that he did had this exaltation about it. The Cambridge Eleven, of which Edward Lyttelton was Captain, and Alfred wicket-keeper, with A. G. Steel bowling balls that were unplayable, was like nothing that the world has ever seen before or since. Our own special memory of him would be of an evening in the Hall in Exeter College, thirty-two years ago, when he stood up, in his fresh beautiful manhood, erect, compact, alert, to speak to Undergraduates on behalf of the White Cross League. Could anything have been more manly, more gracious, more winning?[1]

(4) Professor Henry Drummond — 'He worked in the inquiry rooms; but shy men who would not stand up in a meeting, nor enter an inquiry room, waited for him by the doors as he came out, or waylaid him in the street, or wrote asking him for an interview. He took great trouble with every one of them, as much trouble and interest as if each was a large meeting. His sympathy, his leisure from himself, his strength, won their confidence, as his personal charm on the platform had first stirred their hope, and he thus became acquainted with the secrets of hundreds of lives. Men felt he was not a voice merely, but a friend, and on his arm they were lifted up. He was always hopeful about the most hopeless, picked out some good points in the worst, and sent a man away feeling that he was trusted once more, not only by this friend, but by Christ, by God. The affection which such treatment aroused was extraordinary. I have seen numbers of letters, commonplace enough but for the intense love and gratitude which they breathe, and which sometimes approaches worship. It was such power as was possessed by some of the greatest of the mediæval saints—and he was not twenty-four.'[2]

(5) Cardinal Newman.—'It is hard now to represent adequately the extraordinary personal charm which so many of his contemporaries felt in John Henry Newman. The letters convey much of it, but not all. Yet the tradition of this charm is a fact which must be set down in his biography. It was a charm felt by intellectual minds and even sceptical minds, and by simple and practical men. Blanco White, Mark Pattison, Henry Wilberforce, Frederick Rogers, R. W. Church, and Ambrose St. John were all among his most intimate friends. The almost unique combination of tenderness, brilliancy, refinement, wide sympathy, and holiness doubtless went for much. He had none of the repellent qualities which sometimes make asceticism forbidding. He had an ample allowance of those human sympathies which are popularly contrasted with asceticism. Again, he seemed able to love each friend with a peculiarly close sympathy for his mind and character, and thoughtfulness for the circumstances of his life. The present writer's father—never one of the most intimate of the circle which surrounded Newman at Oxford—used to say that his heart would beat as he heard Newman's step on the staircase. His keen humour, his winning sweetness, his occasional wilfulness, his resentments and anger, all showed him intensely alive, and his friends loved his very faults as one may love those of a fascinating woman; at the same time many of them revered him almost as a prophet. Only a year before his death, after nearly twenty years of misunderstandings and estrangements, W. G. Ward told the present biographer of a dream he had had—how he found himself at a dinner party next to a veiled lady, who charmed him more and more as they talked. At last he exclaimed, "I have never felt such charm in any conversation since I used to talk with John Henry Newman, at Oxford." "I am John Henry Newman," the lady replied, and raising her veil showed the well-known face.'[1]

[1] H. S. Holland, *A Bundle of Memories*, 275.
[2] G. A. Smith, *The Life of Henry Drummond*, 98.

II.

It is impossible to define charm; but it is possible to detect some of the elements that enter into its captivating completeness.

[1] W. Ward, *The Life of John Henry Cardinal Newman*, ii. 248.

1. One element is *Courage*—perhaps physical, certainly moral, courage. Dr. Kelman finds it in Stevenson: 'The incessant worries with the native servants—who seem always to be reverting to savage madness, or breaking down with illness, or relapsing into moral weakness and failure—were of themselves enough to discourage any ordinary man. They were met with a constant compassion, an unfailing effort to please and help. We have already written of the part he played in the political situation and the difficulties under which he did his literary work. The courage displayed in these is eclipsed only by the still more splendid courage with which he met his many illnesses. We have seen how, in the words of Mr. Graham Balfour, "his sufferings did not dull the kindliness and sympathy which largely formed the fascination of his character." Yet the inner victory over trouble was even more brilliant. As we read of the incessant returns of prostrating illness and blindness; pain in the head, the back, the limbs; wakefulness, and its sense of ruin; fever, racking cough and bleeding lungs; we can but thank God for a creature able to meet them all as he did.'[1]

2. Another element is *Sympathy*. Stevenson 'always liked the people he was with, and found the best and brightest that was in them; he entered into all the thoughts and moods of his companions, and led them along pleasant ways, or raised them to a courage and a gaiety like his own.'[2]

3. A third element is *Selflessness*. Dr. Speer speaks of Gordon's 'contempt for hardship and sacrifice and death as parts of the game, "as a matter of course".'[3] And of John Woolman, it has been noticed that 'in his frequent mention throughout his Journal of inward trials and afflictions, he nowhere betrays any personal solicitude, any merely selfish anxiety, for his own soul. His singular conscientious scruples, his close self-questionings, are prompted by a tender concern for universal well-being; an earnest desire that no act or omission of his own should add to the evil and misery under which the creation groans. He offered no prayers for special personal favours. He was, to use his own words, mixed with his fellow-creatures in their misery, and could not consider himself a distinct and separate being. He left all that concerns self to the will of his Father in Heaven, trusting to find a place among the "many mansions," but never asking to see the title deeds of his inheritance. His last public labour was a testimony in the York Meeting in behalf of the poor and enslaved. His last prayer on his death-bed was a commendation of his "fellow-creatures separated from the Divine harmony" to the Omnipotent Power whom he had learned to call his Father.'[1]

4. Is it safe to add *Humour*—or perhaps even a gift for *Satire?* Dr. Whyte finds it in Teresa, and others have found it in her and in other fascinating saints and sinners. 'Her irony and her raillery and her satire are sometimes so delicate that it quite eludes you for the first two or three readings of the exquisite page. And then, when you turn the leaf, she is as ostentatiously stupid and ignorant and dependent on your superior mind as ever Socrates himself was. Till I shrewdly suspect that no little of that "obedience" which so intoxicated and fascinated her inquisitors, and which to this day so exasperates some of her biographers, was largely economical and ironical. Her narrow cell is reported to have often resounded with peals of laughter to the scandal of some of her sisters. In support of all that, I have marked a score of Socratic passages in Woodhead, and Dalton, and Lewis, and Father Coleridge, and Mrs. Cunninghame Graham. They are very delicious passages and very tempting. But were they once begun there would be no end to them. You will believe Froude, for he is an admitted judge

[1] J. Kelman, *The Faith of Robert Louis Stevenson*, 218.
[2] Graham Balfour, *The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ii. 185.
[3] R. E. Speer, *Some Great Leaders in The World Movement*, 290.

[1] *The Journal of John Woolman*, 245.

in all matters connected with the best literature, and he says in his *Quarterly* article on Teresa's writings, "The best satire of Cervantes is not more dainty" '.[1]

5. But we must certainly add *Spirituality*. That also is somewhat indefinable, but it is essential to the fullest final charm of character. Of course it is found in Teresa. 'No one reads the saint's writings who does not presently seek God, and no one through her writings seeks God who does not remain in love with the saint. I have not met with a single spiritual man who does not become a passionate admirer of Santa Teresa.'[2]

In the Christian ideal, says Dr. Figgis, 'there is latent a certain *Vornehmheit*. Nietzsche never realized that it is the sinner who is always commonplace, the real saint who is the distinguished person. Nietzsche's beloved Borgia were vulgar enough; it was Michelangelo and Savonarola, Contarini and Pole who had true distinction. Most of us know some in whom the perfection of Christian saintliness has reached that miracle of refinement. A certain dignity and detachment, a certain grace of holiness seems to attach to such natures, and they attain a charm given by nothing else; neither by high birth nor by high culture.'[3]

Trouble.

Ps. xlvi. 1, 2.—'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear.'

At a place called Groadas, in Norway, there lies a beautiful still lake nestling amongst encircling hills and mountains. As on a summer evening you are rowed across its glassy surface, you realize how that lake redoubles the landscape. As you look down into the clear waters, you see reflected there pictures of the surrounding loveliness. Verdant, grassy slopes, picturesque farmhouses clinging to the green hillsides; further off still, mountains white with eternal snow—all these things seem to lie below you. The limpid lake holds them as it were in its own pearly bosom. It mirrors and reflects them one by one.

And the Book of Psalms is, it seems to me, like that lovely Groadas lake. It seems to hold within itself all the other books of the Bible. Whatever is best and loveliest in prophecy, history, or epistle is mirrored and reflected there. What groups of readers and worshippers gather round these grand old Psalms. Here are the saints of the world finding here, and here alone, fitting words to express their holy adoration, and their praise. But the saints are not alone; the Psalter is the book for sinners also. The Fifty-first Psalm is, as one has said, 'the prodigals' highway back to pardon, to heaven and to God.' The souls that are in sorrow, the hearts that beat high with joy—here they all congregate, here they find full expression for their inmost thoughts. To read the Book of Psalms is in truth to read the devotional history of mankind. And of no individual Psalm is this more true than of the Forty-sixth, from which our text is taken.[1]

1. The text tells us that God is a very present help in trouble.

(1) He is no remote and inaccessible Deity, existing somewhere on the outer rim of the universe, but a God nigh at hand, within call and within hearing—a God who is *present* with us in all the exigencies of life. In all the perplexities and complications of the human situation He is a help to us, constant and effectual; and not only so, His help is close at hand—He is a 'very present' help. No friend or relative can come so close to our side in time of trouble as He.

¶ Christ is nearer to me than father or mother or sister—a nearer relative, a more intimate friend; and I rejoice to follow Him and to love Him.—*Journal* of Henry Martyn on board the *Union* Transport.[2]

[1] A. White, *Santa Teresa*, 14.
[2] Ibid. 11.
[3] J. N. Figgis, *The Will to Freedom*, 137.

[1] H. W. Morrow, *War and Immortality*, 56.
[2] C. E. Padwick, *Henry Martyn*, 127.

Speak to Him, for He heareth,
And spirit with spirit can meet;
Closer is He than breathing,
Nearer than hands or feet.

(2) The help which He gives is enhanced in value by the fact that it is a 'very present' help. The Divine assistance is *available* assistance, else it were no assistance at all. When the Good Samaritan came to the rescue of the wounded traveller on the road to Jericho, he did not tell him of some hospital in Jerusalem, and propose to get him admitted to it if he rose and walked back to the city; but he came to him 'where he was,' and there and then, on the spot, did everything for him that could be done. If Jeremiah's friends had come to him when he was in the dungeon, and had laid a rope at the top of it and shouted down to him, 'There is a rope for you if you can clamber up to where it is,' it would have been but a cruel form of tantalization; but when they let down the rope to where he was, and told him to slip it under his arms, and then pulled him up into daylight and liberty, their assistance was practical, and such as he could avail himself of. And is not that the kind of succour with which our God comes to the aid of His tried children?

2. What is the trouble?

(1) The trouble may be caused by *things that pursue us:* God is our *refuge.* There comes before our minds the picture of the city of refuge and the manslayer, pursued by the avenger of blood until he gets within the walls and is safe. There was a time when we were pursued by the guilt of our sins, and we fled for refuge to God in Jesus Christ, and we have been safe ever since.

(2) The trouble may be over *things that weaken:* God is our *strength.* As Christians we can be miserably weak, and we need the enduement of the Holy Spirit to strengthen us. And God Himself is our strength. 'Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem,' said our Lord, 'until ye be endued with power from on high.' Now it is something to have the prestige of a good name; that is a power from behind us. There is also a power in influences that are good exerted round about us. We may have all this power, but what we need most is power from on high. All other powers will not take the place of this.

(3) The trouble may come from *things that frighten.* 'Therefore will we *not fear.*' We may have our refuge and be saved; we may have our strength and be strong, and yet be fearful. But if we have taken refuge in Christ, and the Holy Spirit is our strength, we will not fear though the earth be removed. The earth means everything that is earthly; all the temporal things, social, political, ecclesiastical. Though the very foundations go from under me I will not be afraid, for I shall have God left. Though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, I will not be afraid, for I have God as my refuge, my strength, my foundation. The Psalmist says elsewhere, 'What time I am afraid, I will trust,' and in fear it is a good thing to trust. But he takes a step further and says, 'I will trust, and not be afraid.' Whatever may come, individually, nationally, or internationally, the Christian has a right to repose in God with a quietness of heart that does not tremble.

¶ What a history this Psalm has!

It is the fourteenth century. The Russians are in sore trouble. They are beset by great Tartar hordes. They are like to be engulfed in an overwhelming tide of ruin. Then a great, a holy man—Sergius the hermit was his name—roused his countrymen, led them on to face the foe; and when at the sight of the terrible Tartar host his own heart began to quail, he renewed his energy by reciting aloud the Forty-sixth Psalm—'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.' He recited these grand words, then plunged into the battle, and, strong in the strength of the Lord, smote his enemies before him, and won a victory final and complete.

The years roll on, and here is a saintly monk. He is full of courage and daring. He has defied pope and cardinal. He has preached at the risk of his life the doctrine of justification by faith alone. But was Luther always

courageous, always on the crest of the wave? No, he had his moods, just as you and I have; and when doubt, discouragement, darkness were creeping over his soul, he was wont to say to his friend Melanchthon, 'Come, Philip, let us sing the Forty-sixth Psalm.'

We pass on now to England, and our own great Oliver Cromwell is opening his second parliament. He exhorts the parliament to remember that their great work should be to make England an emblem of heaven, where God's will reigns supreme; and he closes with these wonderful words: 'If you set your hearts to it, you will sing Luther's psalm,' meaning Psalm Forty-six. 'That,' continues he, 'is a rare psalm for a Christian; "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." If Pope and Spaniard and Devil set themselves against us, yet in the name of the Lord we shall destroy them. "The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge" '.

We come on now to the close of the eighteenth century, and at the Chapel House of the City Road, London, John Wesley lies dying. What are the last words the great preacher, whose voice wakened slumbering England, is heard to utter? They are these: 'The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge.'

One last incident. It is Sunday in far away India in the January of 1842. The news of the terrible Cabul disaster has been carried to the nearest fortified place, where the little garrison of Englishmen seemed, humanly speaking, helpless behind their poor defences of crumbling mud. But there was in that garrison a young subaltern, one who was able to say ere he died: 'I have for forty years so ruled my life that when death came I might face it without fear.' This youth, as there was no chaplain in the city, read the service on the Sunday following the bad news. He chose as a special portion the Forty-sixth Psalm, told his comrades how Luther was wont to use it in seasons of special difficulty, exhorted the men to courage and dependence upon God; and so that little band of Englishmen, inspired by the faith of Henry Havelock, held the fortress till help came.[1]

[1] H. W. Morrow, *War and Immortality*, 57ff.

Calamity.

Ps. xlvi. 2.—'Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.'

THERE are two reasons for believing that Psalm xlvi. is, at least in part, an 'Earthquake Psalm.' One is its language, which tells us that 'God is our refuge and strength . . . therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.' The other is that we have an experimental illustration how this Psalm once coincided with an earthquake, as if they had been timed to travel together. There was an earthquake in London while John Wesley was preaching in the City Road chapel. Naturally the congregation were alarmed; perhaps they thought the last day, or the last but one, had arrived. But the means of dispelling their fears was the preacher's voice reciting those verses, 'God is our refuge . . . though the earth be removed.' Thus the Psalm and the earthquake are co-ordinated; indeed, we can hardly have one without the other. The Psalm was born amid the shaking: its confidence is the child of the uncertainty, at least for those who know God.[1]

From time to time some great catastrophe falls upon human life, appalling the stoutest heart and staggering the civilized world. Most frequently it comes in the form of some frightful natural calamity of flood, or earthquake, or fire, making man feel how puny a thing he is. Against such natural calamities there is practically no protection, no defence. Civilization, which man's age-long toil and genius has reared for the protection and for the comfort of human life, affords no comfort, no protection here. Rather, it tends to work on the side of the destructive forces, so that they fall with the more crushing weight, and achieve the more deadly results.

In like manner calamities fall upon families and individuals. The world is not shocked; humanity is not staggered; there are no

[1] J. Rendel Harris, *As Pants the Hart*, 185.

ghastly descriptions in the newspapers to awaken human pity. All that happens is that some loving heart hears a whisper that sounds like the shock of doom; some honest soul is involved in a vile conspiracy of falsehood that robs him of his good name and lays his life in ruins; or the postman—that messenger of fate—brings an innocent-looking letter, and forthwith the sun is blotted out of the sky. For a time the whole world reels beneath the feet of those who are stricken. Calamities like these, whether they happen on a large scale or on a small, raise obstinate questions. In face of them, is it possible to believe in God? Thousands have said 'No.' The world in which such frightful calamities are permitted cannot, they feel, be governed by a just, a wise, and a loving God. 'There is no God,' they say; 'blind, unfeeling, impersonal forces of Nature alone exist; they are without mercy; they strike and spare not.' Real Christian hearts are troubled and shaken in their faith, when they ask whether the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Father of peace and God of love, can sit on the throne of the universe and allow such things to be. Not alone in the face of some wholesale horror of death do they feel these things, but when in some commonplace way they themselves are stricken.

1. Now, first of all, calamity, suffering, is part of the settled order of God's world. Human nature being what it is, God knows what this world would be without the discipline of suffering. It is one of God's greatest moral agents, one of His ministering angels; and it does more than any other single thing to cleanse and purify and uplift human life, and clear the way for the progress of mankind. Remember what Paul said: 'The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now, waiting for'—what? 'waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God.' That is what all the groaning and travailing is for; it is awaiting and aworking that the sons of God may be revealed; and without it there is little hope for the moral progress of mankind. It is the world's great altar-stairs of suffering and of sacrifice—not its towers of Babel, not its lordly palaces—that lead through darkness up to God.

¶ Sir Francis Younghusband, in his book, 'Within,' offers us a new religious formula, a formula without God. Sir Francis, the world-wide traveller, the skilled diplomat, the leader in perilous political missions in China and Tibet, reveals himself everywhere in his pages as a man of noble instincts, of scrupulous honour, of rigid conscientiousness. But he had not long ago an experience of terrible suffering. He was run down on the Continent by a motor-car, which broke him up and laid him, for six months, on a bed of agonizing pain. There, as he lay, he ruminated on the whole problem of suffering; on the awful extent of it in the world, and on its seeming needlessness. He comes to the conclusion that this fact rules out the possibility of an all-wise and benevolent Creator. What, then, is there?

Is it a matter of the human experience that suffering rules out God? It is in suffering that so many of us find Him—find Him, be sure, not as an impassive Being, who sits on high, enjoying His own happiness while His creatures endure; but One who is in it all, who has emptied Himself, limited His power, entered into our human conditions, who bears for us, bears in us all our pains, who carries this cross not in history only, but in every human heart. Against our diplomat's formula of despair let us put that of R. L. Stevenson, a sufferer also, if ever there was one, diseased from the beginning, driven from place to place in the wide world by pressure of the malady which finally killed him. He has that first revolt; have we not all had it? But his deeper experience tells another story:

'I cannot forgive God for the sufferings of others. . . . But when I consider my own fate, I grow conscious of His gentle dealing. All those whom I now pity with indignation are perhaps not less fatherly dealt with than myself.'

And again:

'If I, from my spyhole, looking with purblind eyes upon the least part of a fraction of the universe, yet perceive in my own destiny

some broken evidences of a plan, and some signals of an over-ruling Goodness, shall I then be so mad as to complain that all cannot be deciphered?'[1]

2. It is a great test and a great opportunity. In countless disasters we know houses built with hands have been thrown down like children's toys. Stately buildings have crumbled into dust, or have collapsed like houses of cards. Whole miles of area have been covered with ruins; but in the midst of that frightful havoc certain buildings have stood that were built of different materials, or constructed on different principles from the rest. They were able to withstand the force that wrecked their neighbours. Calamity is a great test; and it is not a test of buildings alone; it is a test of human institutions and human character. For a moment it may leave men stunned, stupid, speechless, frenzied; but in due time it enables them to understand where their strength lies and where their weakness. It removes many a rotten prop on which they have been leaning; it reveals to them what alone in life can stand the stress and strain. Many a man and woman has reason to thank God for that revelation—the revelation of the rotten props of life; the revelation of the things in life that stand and are strong; the revelation that throws them back on the vital facts of human nature, and on great eternal purposes, and on those convictions and realities by which alone men can withstand in the evil day, and having done all, can stand. There is a passage in Hebrews where the writer speaks of calamity as the remover of those things that are shaken, as of things that have been made, that those things which cannot be shaken may stand? It is a good and a necessary thing that men should learn with regard to their own character and life, and their own institutions, what things cannot be shaken, what things have in them the strength and steadfastness of God—a great test, and at the same time a great opportunity.

¶ There are few things more apparent in human life than the fact that calamity means opportunity. In 1665 the great plague swept over London, and was followed by the great fire. The heart of the city was destroyed; the citizens suffered untold hardships at the moment. They counted it all an unalleviated curse; on the contrary, it was a saving of life, a saving of untold suffering. It was one of God's richest blessings to London. The old, plague-haunted, insanitary, congested hovels were destroyed, and the new, happier, better, brighter London was built upon the ruins.[1]

3. Calamity is one of the noblest hand-maids of religion. It is the quickener of faith. The Psalmist has a very illuminating verse in which he speaks of the people who have no changes, and who do not fear God. There is nothing that so breeds atheism as monotony. The familiar and commonplace loses its significance for us, and we need to have an object-lesson from time to time to startle us broad awake, to keep us alive as to the meaning of life, to open our eyes to the presence and power of God.

¶ After the earthquake and fire in San Francisco, the people reared altars in the midst of the ruins, and on the first Sunday after they had lost their all, they joined their voices in the worship of God, and many of them felt His presence as they had never felt it before. That is a strange fact; but it is true and significant that calamity creates faith far more than it destroys it. It brings God nearer to man, and makes Him real as nothing else can do.[1]

The Holy Communion.

Ps. xlvi. 10.—'Be still.'

THE common rule of life is that we should be up and doing, diligent in every good word and work. Ordinarily every day has its task of duty plainly laid to our hand, and it is our business to take up that task and do it with decision and patience, whatsoever it be. As a

[1] J. Brierley, *Religion and To-day*, 105ff.

[1] P. D. Thomson.
[2] Ibid.

rule, there is nothing worth having which is to be had without working hard for it. That is the common law of life to all men and in all matters. Life is not shaped ready to our hands, leaving us only to wait for what God is pleased to send us. He has endowed us with faculties by which we can serve Him and also serve ourselves, and they must not be left to rust away in idleness. Sometimes our efforts may seem to be vain, and come to nothing: at other times they may be ill-directed, and apparently do more harm than good. Yet whatever failures happen to us, we must not sit down and fold our hands, and give up trying. We have to work while it is called to-day, ere the night cometh when no man can work.

That is the common law for all; and yet there are seasons when there may be nothing for us to do but just wait, seasons when it will be most profitable for us to be still. A man must think in order that he may work to any purpose; and he needs some leisure, also, to meditate on higher things than his daily task-work. There is a time for everything, as the Preacher says—a time for quiet as well as a time for action—a time to work, and also a Sabbath to wait and be still. Moreover, we shall not know the Lord aright unless we are brought now and then to feel 'This is His doing, not mine. I was brought to such a pass, that I had nothing to do but in quietness and confidence to be still and know that the Lord he is God.'

1. It is the quiet heart that we need now at this season, not the busy or the burdened intellect. But it is a heart that is not quietly contented, but quietly *expectant*. Are we not looking for the coming of the Lord Jesus to our communion—the presence of Him who is the Master of the feast? Truly He cometh not with observation, but yet He will come to every soul that is expecting and longing for Him. Be still, then, lest the Lord should be in this place, and we, any of us, know it not. We cannot point to any visible tokens of His presence. Therefore we say not, Lo! He is here; or Lo! He is there. But be assured He will be here, if we are waiting and hoping for Him in the hush of a deep heart-yearning. We have seen a throng of people met to hear someone whom they held in honour, and how, as the moment for his appearance drew near, they instinctively quieted themselves, and sat almost in a breathless calm at last, fearful to lose his faintest word or tone. That is the kind of expectant stillness that should possess our souls now. Our Lord is not far off. He is surely coming, and will manifest Himself unto them that love Him, and look for His coming. Let us, then, put away restless, troubled thoughts and the unquiet mind. What if He were to speak to us, and we not hear Him? There are times when that happens—times when He knocks at the heart's door, and has to go away, because we were not looking for Him, and did not heed His call. But surely this ought to be with all of us a season of lively expectation, when the soul is waiting and hoping for the fellowship of His love.

2. But, further, this season of quiet expectancy ought to be no less a time of silent receptivity. Our minds and hearts must be open to the Divine influence, answering like the wind-harp every breath of that Spirit which is like the wind that bloweth where it listeth. Speaking in his own line of things, the poet Wordsworth describes what he calls a state of wise passiveness as being necessary in order to receive impressions and influences from the world of Nature. The poet thinks that from a state of simple receptivity not a little wisdom may be gathered; and surely he is right. It is not everyone, indeed, that can thus lie on the lap of Nature, and let his senses be steeped in its various sights and sounds, and get any good from it. One must have a reflective spirit to profit much by such passiveness. Yet for one who is prepared to learn its lessons, assuredly it may be most wholesome and good.

It is this kind of receptivity, then, that we should have now, only the impressions we should be receiving are not from the world but from God—not from Nature, but from its

Lord. There are Divine influences all round us; let us be still and receive them. Truly, we must be prepared for this, just as the plate in the camera must be sensitized ere the sunlight can paint its pictures there. We need the spirit of God in order to receive the things of God. Therefore let us seek that preparation. Then, if we are expecting good we shall get it as we receive the bread and wine, and recall the touching memories that gather around them, and the inspiring truths that lie in the heart of them, and look for Him who said to us, 'Lo! I am with you alway, even to the end of the world.' 'Open thy mouth wide,' the Psalmist says, 'and I will fill it.' Let us be ready to receive what God will send. When He comes, be sure He will come with a full hand. Let us be still, then, and know that He is God.[1]

A sacred stillness falls around,
A symbol of the heavenly rest;
While Thou within our midst art found,
And givest of Thy best.

Bread for Thy broken Body is,
Wine for Thy life-blood shed for us;
We see within these mysteries
Thy love most marvellous.

O strengthen us, Thou Bread divine,
We need Thy stay this coming week;
Enrich our hearts, Thou living Wine,
O Christ whom now we seek![2]

Knowledge and Stillness.

Psalm xlvi. 10.—'Be still, and know that I am God.'

One of the deepest needs of the human heart is for knowledge of God. It is not enough to hope about God. We want to be sure. Here we find ourselves in this beautiful but mysterious world. We cannot say where we came from, we have only dim ideas as to where we are going. Everything depends upon whether there is a God behind it all, and whether we really know Him. There are men in the world to-day half hoping, half doubting, who would give every penny they possess if only they could be certain of God.

There are some men who know God; there are others to whom He is only a hopeful possibility. To put it in another way, some men's knowledge of God is a matter of theory; other men's knowledge is a matter of experience. The first know a good many arguments about God; the others know God Himself. The contrast is well summed up in the sayings of two great English poets of the Victorian era. One of them taught that we may faintly trust the larger hope. The other said: 'I say the acknowledgment of God in Christ, accepted by thy reason, solves for thee all questions in the earth and out of it.' The difference, not between the two men, but between their two statements, is this: Tennyson hoped; Browning knew.

1. There are two things which it would be worth our while to think over quietly. The first is the general principle which underlies our text: that there is a connection between knowledge and stillness. One of the chief hindrances to knowing God is the rush of human life. In this respect there is a striking contrast between East and West. In the East men take time to think. There is no haste or bustle in their lives. It is in no sense unnatural to them to sit by the hour quietly meditating. We in the West are always doing something. It is now our business, now our pleasure—a score of different activities always ready to our hand; no sooner one ended than the next begun. So we have no time to think. It is just there that our weakness lies. Do we ask why so many people are not sure of God? One reason is that they are never quiet. That is what the Psalmist suggests—that it is possible for men to be so busy in their doings that they fail to see what God is doing in the earth. The only remedy is to cease for a while from their own activities, to allow a period of calm to interpose in their lives. Let us be still! Let us have done with it all. Let us

[1] E. Dynes.
[2] Walter C. Smith, *Sermons*, 36ff.

rest for a moment from our own vain strivings, and give God a chance to make His impression upon our soul.

There is a sense in which God never seems so near as when everything about is hushed and we ourselves are quiet and still. It is in these moments that we are most conscious of His presence. That is the experience of many men, and of men different in temperament and outlook. It was in lonely fellowship with Nature that Wordsworth felt the presence, the sense sublime, of a Being deeper than Nature. It is so with men of a scientific mind. A brilliant young scientist who often questioned God's existence said once that there was an experience in his life when his doubt was shaken, and he felt that, after all, God was real. It was when he was alone under a starry sky. This is true again and again of men of action. Captain Peary, who discovered the North Pole, said it was impossible for a man to spend his life amid the mysterious loneliness of miles of unbroken ice without feeling that there is a God. By an impressive coincidence Sir Ernest Shackleton, quite independently, made the same declaration. A famous Alpine climber in one of his books tells of a mountaineer who, resting half-way up a mountain, scribbled idly on the rocks, 'There is no God'; but when he reached the top, and saw beneath him range after range of snow-clad peaks, there crept into his soul such a mysterious sense of awe that as he descended he changed what he had previously written into: 'The fool hath said in his heart there is no God.' In the absolute stillness of that mountain summit, far away from the rush of human life, that man's soul had discovered God.

2. So we come back to our text, to see it, perhaps, in a new perspective. The poet, the scientist, the explorer in the lonely Arctic regions become conscious of God because from time to time they get away from the stir and rush of distracting activities into the great silence and solitude where God is felt. If we want to know God, we, too, must make such silences in our life. It will not come easily in this wonderful world, in which there are so many things to attract our thought and our notice. It even needs supreme effort to keep some portion of our life for quiet communion with God. It is not easy, but for our true life it is absolutely essential. There are many things in life which matter. The whole point is that we shall make time in our life for that which matters most. And it matters everything that we should know God. We must know God. Apart from Him our life would be crippled, paralysed. For other people's sake we must learn to know God. When men and women are sorrowing all around us we need to be able to say, not I think, but I know, there is a loving God who cares. When men and women all around us are suffering from a deep sense of sin, we need to be able to say, not I hope, but I know, there is a God who can save you. When men and women draw near to the darkness and mystery of death, we must be able to say, not I hope or I think, but I know, that there is an eternal day beyond. What this great world, with all its sin and sorrow and perplexity, is needing is men and women who know, who can speak with the authentic note. The supreme value of our life will consist in our finding this supreme knowledge.

In the early Church, what captured the world was that the Christians struck the authentic note of certainty. They were men who were absolutely sure and certain in their belief. We can do no bigger thing for the world to-day than to bring back to the Church that certain assured knowledge of the deepest realities. From time to time let there be a hush in our life, a great calm in which the voices of the world are lost. God needs such a calm if His voice is to be heard. It is a still, small voice. It demands a silence. The voice is there. If men cannot hear it, it is because they are spending all their time where it is drowned in the greater noises of the world. If we would hear God's voice from time to time, we must go into the silence.[1]

¶ Travellers tell us that there are rivers flowing beneath the streets of the ancient city

[1] H. Bisseker.

of Shechem. During the hours of the day you cannot hear them for the noise of the narrow streets and the bazaars. But evening comes, and the clamour dies away, and the dews of kindly sleep rest on the city; and then quite audibly, in the hush of night, you may hear the music of the buried streams. There are many voices like those hidden waters. You never can hear them save when things are still. There are whisperings of conscience in the bosom which a very little stir can easily drown. There are tidings from the eternal Spirit who is not far away from any one of us; tidings that will come and go unnoticed, unless we have won the grace of being still.[1]

The Shields of the Soul.

Ps. xlvii. 9.—'The shields of the earth belong unto God.'

All fine protectives are the gifts of God. All that is spiritually defensive and sanative is the bounty of His grace. He holds in His hand everything that preserves the inner life from the invasion of disease, and keeps it strong, and sweet, and healthy. All the shields are His; and everything that is in any way a shield of the soul can be found in His great armoury.

And God supplies these shields to His children. They are at the disposal of any soul which sends forth a prayerful cry of need. There are subtle enemies on the road. They lie in ambush. They take us unawares. They are especially vigilant in the season when we are most easily attacked. They watch for the unguarded moments when we stand at ease. They follow us into the times when we are on furlough, when we have laid aside some defensive duty, or when we have left the sanative ministry of common toil. And they are maliciously watchful in those days when the air is soft, and genial, and balmy, and there is nothing to remind us that any hostile presence may ever lurk beside our road. And so we have constant need of the shields of God.

1. Here is one of them—*a healthy sense of the hideousness of sin.* That is one of the greatest shields of the soul. Cardinal Newman wrote, in one of his devotional letters, 'It is a great security against sin to be shocked at it.' The body finds a protective in its repulsion from putrid and nauseous food. Our moral recoils are splendid securities. The patriarch Job laid his hand on one of his defences when he said, 'Cannot my palate discern perverse things?' So long as the palate retains this power of discrimination, and loathes the unclean, its very loathing is part of the armament which will safeguard it along the foulest road. Our moral repulsion is one of the shields of God.

2. Here is another—*a healthy sense of the beauty of holiness.* This sense is a correlative of the former. They may even be regarded as two sides of the same shield. It is our likes that determine our dislikes. Our attractions always suggest our repulsions. It is a mighty defence for the soul to have a passionate love of the lovely, to go along the road eager for every sign of the King's Presence, and to love His appearing. There is a very significant line in the portrayal of the character of Barnabas, which tells us that 'when he saw the grace of God he was glad.' When our emotions kindle at the sight of the things of grace we have a piece of splendid armour. It is one of the shields of God.

3. Here is a third—*the assurance that God loves us.* What a defence that is on the road! It gives birth to songs in the night! And then our very songs add still more to our defences. 'Thou hast compassed me about with songs of deliverance.' 'The joy of the Lord shall be your strength.' All these are typical shields, and we are not left to construct them in the dim light of our own ignorance. These shields belong unto God, and they are the gifts of His grace.[1]

[1] G. H. Morrison, *The Wind on the Heath*, 171.

[1] J. H. Jowett, *Springs in the Desert*, 97, 100ff.

The Character of God.

Ps. xlviii. 14.—'This God is our God.'

1. The first word of religion is that we are closely related to God and that we may rest in Him even now as the earth reposes in the soft caress of the atmosphere. Past all barriers, visible and invisible, here and now we may seek and find and touch the living God, the ultimate ground of all reality. That is the first word of religion. That is the truth after the discovery of which a man begins really to live. That is the truth which our forefathers laid hold of, and which became the ground of their hopes and the ground of their battles for principle—that no Church or priest, no system of thinking or system of worship, no privilege of learning or privilege of place, in the last resort can stand between a man and his God. Here and now we may touch the living God.

2. That being the first word of religion, the first concern of religion is that we should have a right idea of the character of the God we come in contact with. The first question of religion is not, therefore, regarding the existence of God, but regarding the moral qualities in God, the attitude which we conceive Him to take to, and the view we conceive Him to take of, the good and the evil that are in the world. It is of the supremest importance for us with what kind of Infinitude we are habitually in interior communion. As Sir George Adam Smith has said, 'It is not so much a question whether there be a God that reigns as what kind of God He is who reigns.'

Now, in this matter it is not safe to rest upon general impressions lying in our minds, because our relation to good and evil is of such a sort that we may very easily make dangerous assumptions with regard to God's relation both to good and to evil, dangerous assumptions on the side of His considerate charity towards that which He disapproves, dangerous assumptions in connection with His disapproval and wrath against sin. In one mood, that is to say, we may exaggerate the truth of God's clemency; in another mood we may so distort the truth as to His disapproval of sin as to fall insensibly into the conception of Him as a cruel and vindictive and implacable Being.

3. Now, the Bible owes its place among the religious books of the world to the exceeding fairness and courage with which it represents both aspects as present in the Divine character, the aspect of tenderness and the aspect of severity.

Take, by way of illustration, two representations of God, one from near the beginning of the Book and one from near the end. Here is the representation from its earlier pages, from Exod. xxxiv.: 'The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty.' Behold the goodness and the severity of God! And here is a representation from near the end of the Book. God is made to say this in the last chapter but one of the Book of Revelation: 'I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.' It is again: Behold the goodness and the severity of God!

4. It is obvious that if we were to represent God as a gloomy, stern, easily-angry, and vindictive God, and that alone, we should give a representation of God which would be belied by the very sunshine, by the blessed joy of human life and love, by the very bounty of Nature, and the something like a renewal of opportunity which is given to us with every morning's sunrise. But, on the other hand, it is equally obvious that if we represent God only

as kindly, clement, benignant, magnanimous, generous, we give a representation of the Divine character which takes no account of certain distressing facts of everyday experience, the facts of innocent suffering, and the awful fact even of present retribution. And yet, if we combine both, as the Bible at least at first does, and place the two aspects side by side, are we not in danger, and is not the Bible in danger, of representing the Divine nature by means of a contradiction which is really insoluble? Now, unlike the thought of our time, which is running away to-day from the thought of the Divine severity and taking refuge only in the thought of the Divine gentleness, the Bible holds courageously to both right through. It is aware of the difficulty; 'How can God be just and yet justify the ungodly?'—a question which, though it has but little meaning to many of our younger generation, is—Christ apart—to anyone who knows what a moral, free being is, the most insoluble problem in the universe. The Bible is aware of that difficulty, and in Jesus Christ, His life and His death, especially in His death, it presents us with a solution. In the character of the Lord Jesus Christ mercy and judgment, goodness, in the sense of benignity, and severity were seen perfectly combined and harmonized in a higher unity—that higher unity which even His disciples could not get at during His life, but only began to discover after Pentecost, after His violent death and after the dismay that fell upon them between Calvary and Pentecost. Then it was found that mercy and judgment were harmonized in the higher unity of the truth of the Divine substitution of Himself for men; that God has, in some sense as yet to be revealed, and that man only but faintly guesses, harmonized the two by His self-sacrificing love.

5. Now, that solution of the difficulty is not given in a series of propositions: it is given in a living Person, Jesus of Nazareth, in His life and death. He is represented as One in whom God amazingly dwelt in fullness, and yet on the other hand as One in whom humanity, humanness, very, very fully dwelt; and He is represented as suffering and experiencing the extremest condemnation of sin, and experiencing it in such a fashion that His experience came to be recognized, to man's amazement, as God's experience; and He is the now discovered ground of God's capacity to forgive. When that ground of forgiveness had been discovered to men, the Christian Church in a burst of amazement, gratitude, and love came into being and sang its early Pentecostal song. And as the Administrator of this final truth about God—that in Him goodness and severity are combined in a love which is self-sacrificing and self-substitutive, but which we can never compass by our human definitions—as the Administrator of that truth the Lord Jesus Christ will never be superseded.

6. But what is our thought of God to-day? Do we not dread the increase, under the notion of the benignant Fatherhood of God, of the idea of an invertebrate, flabby benevolence in the Deity, in view of the needs of men in the day of dismay and the discovery of sin? There does seem to be just now an amazing lack of this sense of sin, at least in certain directions. A learned theologian in Cambridge said practically this, that the sense of sin was a disease of adolescence, and that it naturally passed away in mid-life, forgotten in the activity of the social conscience. It was, of course, the most ghastly mis-statement of the fact that an intelligent and eminent theologian could make; it shows that there is utterly wrong thinking and absolutely empty feeling about sin. Yes, but the storm must rise again, the agony of failure must sweep over this land again. And when that happens will there not rise again over our land the storm of the agony of the distance from the ideal, the rising and sweeping over the land of emotion for unforgiven sin, of a sense of shame and blame and guilt?

In the older evangelism the note was one of amazement. Men stood before the blood-stained Christ, and they said, 'Glory to Thee!' But the refrain of the modern evangelism is, 'That will be glory for me.'

¶ Once in Scotland the great poet-preacher, Walter C. Smith, in a kindly and condescending conversation with me when a young minister, said: 'Ross, the Christ of the older evangelism could save because He hung on the cross for us and represented there the eternal state of things at the Divine heart; but,' he said, 'I do not know what your Christ is going to do for you young men. This Christ ideal, this beautiful young God, I do not know what He is going to do for you.' It is the Cross that keeps the Gospel alive, and surely the Cross owes its meaning to that great necessity within the Deity for suffering which Dora Greenwell called the greatest doom that could fall upon a moral being of infinite holiness.

> There, not ashamed of scoffing rude,
> In my place condemned He stood,
> Sealed my pardon with His blood;
> Hallelujah! what a Saviour!

Hallelujah, what a God! That is the doctrine of God our Saviour which we are to adorn.[1]

Sin at our Heels.

Ps. xlix. 5.—'Iniquity at my heels compasseth me about' (RV).

THESE words remind us that sin is not done with after it is committed. God forgives sin. But He does not obliterate all its consequences, either in our own lives or in the lives of others. A man may have the light of the City of God flashing in his face, and a whole host of shameful memories and bitter regrets crowding at his heels. We do not know what sin is till we turn our backs on it. Then we find its tenacity and its entanglement. What would we not give if only we could leave some things behind us! What would we not do if only we could put a space between ourselves and our past! The fetters of evil habit may be broken, but their marks are upon us, and the feet that bore the fetters go more slowly for them many days. The hands that have been used to grasping and holding do not open without an effort, even though the heart has at last learned that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

Iniquity at our heels is sometimes an old sin in a new form. You remember the difficulty that Hiawatha had in hunting down Pau-puk Keewis. That mischievous magician assumed the form of a beaver, then that of a bird, then that of a serpent; and though each in turn was slain, the magician escaped and mocked his pursuer. Surely a parable of our strife with sin. We smite it in one form and it comes to life in another. One day a man is angry—clenched fingers and hot words. He conquers his anger; but the next day there is a spirit of bitterness rankling in his heart, and maybe a tinge of regret that he did not say and do more when his heart was hot within him and fire was on his lips. The sin he faced and fought yesterday has become iniquity at his heels. Having failed to knock him down, it tries to trip him up. Many waste their energies trying to deal with the *forms* of sin, and never grapple with the *fact* of sin. Hence the evil things that compass men's souls about with their dread ministries of suggestion, and flutter on unhallowed wings in the wake of life. The sin that confronts us reveals to us our need of strength, but the sin that dogs our steps has, maybe, a deeper lesson to teach us—even our need of heart-deep holiness. Good resolution will do much to clear the path ahead, but only purity of character can rid us of the persistent haunting peril of the sin that plucks at the skirt of life. The deliverance God offers to the struggling soul covers not only the hour of actual grappling with the foe, but all the hours when it is the stealth and not the strength of evil that we most have cause to fear.

Yes, and our sins come to life again in the lives of others. The light word that ought to have been a grave word and that shook another's good resolution, the cool word that ought to have been a warm word and that chilled a pure enthusiasm—we cannot have done with these things. Parents sometimes live to see their sins of indulgence or of neglect blighting the lives of those to whom

[1] G. A. Johnston Ross.

they owed a debt of firmness and kindness. It is iniquity at the heels. These passages of carelessness and unfaithfulness haunt men, be their repentance never so bitter and their amendment never so sincere and successful.

But all this is for discipline and not for despair. It casts us back upon God's mercy. It keeps the shadow of the Cross upon all our path. It has something to do with the making of 'a humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart.' The memory of the irreparable is a sorrow of the saints.

Saint, did I say? with your remembered faces,
Dear men and women whom I sought and slew!
Ah when we mingle in the heavenly places
How will I weep to Stephen and to you!

Only let us not be afraid or wholly cast down. Rather let us say, 'Wherefore should I fear . . . when iniquity at my heels compasseth me about?' By the grace of God the hours of the soul's sad memory and of clinging regrets shall mean unto us a ministry of humility and a passion of prayer. And through them God shall give us glimpses of the gateway of that life where regret and shame and sorrow fall back unable to enter. There is a place whither the iniquity at a man's heels can no longer follow him, and where in the perfect life the soul, at last, is able to forget.[1]

¶ In its most typical exercise, Dr. Whyte's imagination was always an unveiling—now of the human heart, and now—especially in his later years—of the glories of that future world of which most preachers of the day almost hesitated to speak. Yet the two were inseparably linked; for the greatest glory of the world of the redeemed was, he often repeated, that its denizens had been such men and women as we now are. One such sermon closed with an account of 'a three-cornered contest in heaven' between William Cowper, the preacher, and one of his hearers, who all challenged Paul's claim to be the greatest example of the redeeming power of Christ. 'I think I know,' he said, 'who will carry away the prize from you both. Nay, I am sure I know!'—dropping his voice to a whisper, as he closed the Bible—'Of whom *I* am chief!'[1]

[1] P. C. Ainsworth, *The Threshold Grace*, 91ff.

The Shepherd Death and the Shepherd Christ.

Ps. xlix. 14.—'Death shall be their shepherd' (RV).
John x. 11.—'I am the good shepherd.'

THERE is a familiar poem in which death is spoken of as a sexton—

Nigh to a grave that was newly made,
Leaned a sexton old, on his earth-worn spade,
His work was done, and he paused to wait
The funeral train through the open gate;
A relic of bygone days was he,
And his locks were white as the foamy sea;
And these words came from his lips so thin,
'I gather them in: I gather them in.'

'I gather them in! for man and boy
Year after year of grief or joy,
I've builded the houses that lie around
In ev'ry nook of this burial-ground;
Mother and daughter, father and son,
Come to my solitude one by one,
But come they strangers, or come they kin,
I gather them in: I gather them in.

Many are with me, but still I'm alone,
I'm king of the dead, and I make my throne
On a monument slab of marble cold,
And my sceptre of rule is the spade I hold;
Come they from cottage, or come they from hall,
Mankind are my subjects, all, all, all!
Let them loiter in pleasure, or toilfully spin,
I gather them in: I gather them in.

I gather them in! and their final rest
Is here, down here in the earth's dark breast!'

[1] G. F. Barbour, *Alexander Whyte*, 302.

And the sexton ceased, for the fun'ral train
Wound mutely over that solemn plain;
And I said to my heart, 'When time is told
A mightier voice than that sexton's old
Will sound o'er the last trump's dreadful din,
"I gather them in: I gather them in!" '

1. In this Psalm death is spoken of in somewhat similar language, but the figure used is that of a shepherd. 'Death shall be their shepherd.' The Psalmist's trouble is with the prosperity of the wicked. How does he solve it? He says, Look at those wealthy men, haughty, arrogant, strutting along boastfully, as if everything in the world were theirs. Look at that man who suddenly finds some deadly disease grasp the cords of his heart. Look at him on his bed, gathering his rich brothers round him, imploring them, offering them anything, anything to drag him back from the jaws of the grave, from cold, horrible death. Nothing, not one of them, can redeem his soul or pay to God a ransom to exempt him from death, for the price of a soul is so big! Heap up all the wealth of the world—it comes short.

The death of such a man is utter disaster. He gropes all round for any rock that juts above him, any point or fringe whereby he might escape. He grasps at anything, anything that does not belong to cold death, but finds nothing to lay hold on with the thrill of God's eternal life in it. All his faculties were earthy; all his enjoyments, of time, food, drink, sensual indulgence, all of them are engulfed in that black grave. Look at him clinging to his estates, his houses, his wealth; is there nothing he can do? He catches at a straw. He fixes his name on his estates. His name will live, but he cannot. He would, if he could, live on, enjoying his estates, but death swallows him up.

With what irony the Psalmist tears the hollow sham in pieces, that all in his death that he has to hope for, all that survives him, is an empty name. Look at him, great man, bowed to and worshipped in his life; look at him now in his death. What is he? No better than the dumb, brute beasts that are slaughtered. His death is on a level with theirs. Now, says the Psalmist, come back into the world of eager competition for money, where men sacrifice honour and peace of conscience that they may heap up ill-gotten riches; where good men whose hearts cling to God and to holiness, who love honour, truth, and honesty, who want to keep their souls and garments unspotted, are shaken by this aspect of wealth, of success, of prosperity. Come back into the world with me from that deathbed, and look at that march of triumphal, arrogant, smiling, godless prosperity. Look where these men are going with their high and haughty steps, their successful smiling faces. If they did but know it, they are like brute sheep being driven on by a horrible ghastly spectre. Death is their shepherd, hurrying them on to fill the grave with its cold and mouldering dust.

2. Turn to the other text, 'I am the good shepherd.' What a contrast. 'I am the good shepherd, I know my sheep . . . and they follow me . . . and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.' The man who has been true to conscience, the man who has been loyal to honour and goodness, the man who has listened to the voice of God and is striving to make his life responsive music to the touch of God's fingers, the man who for the sake of truth, the man who for love of other men, has given up his own pleasure, has borne scorn, contempt, and injury, the man who has suffered for the sake of sin—to him death also comes. Death comes to take away his earthly home. Death comes to take away his bodily transient life. Yes, but in that hour the voice Divine speaks within him. There are for him memories of hours when he spoke to God in prayer, and God spoke back to him. There are memories of those days when his heart rested itself on God, and he is at peace. The Good Shepherd has taken care of, will still take care of, His sheep.

Life here and life hereafter are continuous. They are homogeneous, on one plane, though an ascending one. As we have been, we shall be. If we take Christ for our Shepherd here, and follow Him, though from afar, and with

faltering steps, amidst all the struggles and windings and rough ways of life, then and only then, will He be our Shepherd, to go with us through the darkness of death, to make it no reluctant expulsion from a place that we would fain continue to be in, but a tranquil and willing following of Him by the road which He has consecrated for ever, and deprived for ever of its solitude, because He Himself has trod it.

Those two possibilities are before each of us. Either of them may be ours. One of them must be. Looking on this picture and on that, let us choose—God help us to choose aright—which of the two will describe our experience. Shall we have Christ for our Shepherd, or shall we have Death for our shepherd? The answer to that question lies in the answer to another—Have we washed our robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; and are we following Him?

For as I do the Father's will
  Within me grows the immortal part,
I have the power His gift to still
  And nevermore my soul to chart
In quest unto the holy hill.

Whom most I served must needs have claim
  When at Death's parting ways I stand,
Lust and attendant hosts of shame
  May lead me to their lowest land,
Where faintest burns the pilgrim flame.

O let me at life's end bring loss,
  Through faith maintained and self denied,
That by the virtue of a cross
  I may pass onward purified.[1]

In the Day of Trouble.

Ps. l. 14, 15.—'Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High: and call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.'

The day of trouble comes to the Christian as it comes to the unbeliever, and we are not to expect that because we belong to Christ we shall be immune from ordinary calamities. God's people of old had their share of these. The day of trouble came to the Israelites as individuals—and Psalmist after Psalmist speaks of his experience in it—either how he had met or how he will meet it. And the day of trouble came to the nation of Israel as well. One typical instance is when Sennacherib sent his armies to Jerusalem, and an insulting and blasphemous letter to Hezekiah, King of Judah. The King was in despair; he rent his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, went into the Temple and sent Eliakim to the prophet Isaiah with the message: 'This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and blasphemy.'

But, though trouble may come to righteous men and to God's chosen people, still they are not left without the knowledge of how to meet it. And the way to meet it is to go to God with it. That is what Isaiah did, and God gave victory to His people. That is what the Psalmists did. One Psalmist tells how the day of trouble came to him. What then? 'I sought the Lord,' he says. Another looks forward without fear to that day, whenever it should come: 'In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee.' Another breathes the prayer, 'The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble.' And in our text the Psalmist holds before us the secret of deliverance from trouble. God says to man, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee.' Yet that is not the whole message; there is something before it and something after it. We usually forget this. We think that this is all the message; we have only to call in order to have deliverance. But we need to consider the message in its entirety or we shall not learn it aright. Here it is: 'Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High: and call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.'

1. First there is a privilege offered us: 'Call upon me.' In our own individual lives that is the only true way to meet difficulty. We are not to rebel against it; we are not to let it shatter our faith in the things we have com-

[1] P. R., in *The British Weekly, May 7th*, 1925.

monly believed. We are not to be hardened. Nor are we to brood over it, or to accept it only because we have no other choice, and have to submit. That is not the right spirit to show when adversity comes upon us. 'Doest thou well to be angry?' Nor are we simply to resolve to make the most of it in our own strength; we are to turn to God and call upon Him for help. God is pleased when we realize our own weakness; for then His strength has opportunity to work, and we discover that when we are weak then are we strong.

¶ I am surprised that prayer to God in the day of trouble should be such an acceptable offering, for when we are in trouble our prayers are very likely to be selfish; they are forced, moreover, being pressed from our lips by the iron hand of adversity, or wrung from us by the stress of circumstances. Does it not look as if we were but making a convenience of God, when we fly to Him only in our difficulties? Yet in this Psalm He assures us that nothing is more pleasing to Him than prayer in the day of trouble. He tells us that, if we only seek His help in the time of our distress, it will be an offering more acceptable to Him than all the sacrifices that were ever presented on Jewish altars.[1]

2. Then the Psalmist takes us into the right atmosphere for prayer. Offer unto God thanksgiving.' We need to come not as those whose only desire is to get, but as those whose first care is to give. We need to come before God with a recognition of His past goodness to us; with the knowledge of what He has done for us; we need to come pouring our souls out before Him in praise. Praise is the atmosphere of prayer. How often these two are mentioned together—'Give thanks to God, call on his name'—for they are intimately related. We do not pray in the right spirit unless our souls are filled with gratitude to God. How near were Jesus' thanksgivings to His prayers: 'Father, I thank thee, Lord of heaven and earth.' How often do Paul's letters begin with praise: 'I thank my God.' The unthankful spirit is not the praying spirit. Prayer is not a mere asking from God. It is fundamentally 'an offering up of our desires unto God for things agreeable to His will, in the name of Christ; with confession of our sins and thankful acknowledgment of His mercies.'

¶ I believe thanksgiving a greater mark of holiness than any other part of prayer. I mean special thanksgiving for mercies asked and received. It is a testimony to prayers being remembered, and therefore earnest prayer. It is unselfish, and more loving.[1]

3. And that is not all. We perform the duty; we call upon God; we have the right atmosphere—the spirit of thanksgiving; we have, further, to fulfil a condition, 'Pay thy vows unto the most High.' When we come before Him in prayer, we are to remember our obligations to God—what we have promised in times past to do unto and for Him. We need times when we calmly think over the solemn vows that we have taken upon ourselves. When we gave ourselves to Him, we undertook, in His strength, to lead holy and circumspect lives, to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, to do what we could for His Church and cause and Kingdom. There is always a danger, however, of our falling away from our vows, of our forgetting our promises, and leaving our first love. It is difficult to retain our enthusiasm in the work of Christ: there are so many things ready to damp our ardour, and our service to God often becomes lukewarm. Hence the need for the word of the Psalmist: 'Pay thy vows unto the most High.' We read that it is better that we should not make vows to God at all than, after having made them, forget all about them. For there is a deterioration in the character when we pay no regard to our promises. Every duty left undone, as Ruskin says, hides some truth we should have known.

4. If, then, we observe the command of God to call upon Him, if we do so in the right spirit, and on the right conditions, then He

[1] S. L. Wilson, *Helpful Words for Daily Life*, 338.

[1] *Memoir of Norman Macleod, D.D.*, ii. 11.

gives us a gracious promise: 'I will deliver thee.' No one ever yet called on God, earnestly and sincerely, who did not receive an answer. The answer may not have been what we expected, or looked for, but God has not turned a deaf ear to our petitions. He knows what is best for us, and answers in accordance with His most holy mind and will. And, above all, He hears us when, out of a sense of need, we lift our hearts to Him—when in the day of trouble we call upon Him. Whatever may be the nature of our need, we find here the remedy. God is the hearer and the answerer of prayer. Yes, in the day of trouble, when we call upon Him, He fulfils His promise, 'I will deliver you.'

¶ Now followed very anxious days, and publishers all refused his play. How many weeks or months it was after Lady Byron's death I do not know; but my mother would tell us how one day she had started out to buy certain necessaries, and in the omnibus had lost her purse with the very last sovereign in it. They did not know where to turn next for help, and there was hardly enough food in the house for the children's dinner. Only Lily, with her instinctive understanding, realized how bad things were, and found her own appetite was providentially indifferent. Then, my mother said, as the evening closed in, she and my father were standing hand in hand as if waiting for some answer to their prayers. It was in the little front drawing-room of Tudor Lodge, and the rain poured down upon the weeping ash that overspread the tiny garden. The postman walked up the steps, dropped a letter in the box, and with his double knock woke them from their quietude. The letter was from Lady Byron's executors enclosing a cheque for £300, a legacy of which they had not been advised.[1]

5. And what will the result be?—that we shall give glory to God. 'I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.' Not that we are to win glory for ourselves, but that we should have a new vision of God, and a new sense of His power. Thus it was with the Psalmist. God's deliverance gave him a new consciousness of God, of His power, and of His mercy, and he says, 'I will sing of thy power; yea, I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning: for thou hast been my defence and refuge in the day of my trouble. Unto thee, O my strength, will I sing: for God is my defence and the God of my mercy.' It is a happy 'day of trouble' that brings us such a vision of God.

[1] G. Macdonald, *George Macdonald and His Wife*, 313.

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